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POET LORE DRAMATISTS

FRANÇOIS de CUREL

THE
BEAT OF THE WING
(LE COUP D'AILE)

(A play in three acts)

Translated from the French by
ALICE VAN KAATHOVEN



RICHARD G. BADGER
The Gorham Press
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CHARACTERS

MICHEL PRINSON.

BERNARD PRINSON.

COLONEL HÉROUARD.

THE FLAG BEARER.

CHARLES, A SERVANT.

HÉLÈNE FROMENT.

CLOTILDE PRINSON (wife of Bernard).

JEANNE PRINSON, her daughter.

MATHILDE RENTY.

AMÉLIE, her daughter.

The three acts take place in a large room serving both as hall and smoking-room, in a villa built on a high cliff overlooking the sea. At the rear runs a gallery enclosed in glass, which, on the left, leads to the other rooms; to the right a small enclosed vestibule leads to the front door. The gallery communicates with the hall by two steps, the vestibule by three. Through the panes of glass in the rear, at the left, an unlimited stretch of ocean is seen, and at the right, smiling hills surrounding a bay. Through the glass at the right the same hills are seen studded with villas and their surrounding grounds, and immediately outside the window the garden is perceived, separated from the road by an iron grille with a gate.

ACT I

SCENE I

CLOTILDE, JEANNE

It is six o'clock in the morning. CLOTILDE and JEANNE, in tea gowns, are following with their eyes, the manoeuvres of a mimic battle taking place on the beach. Outside loud reports of musketry are heard, some at close range and some at a distance. The sound of a furious cannonading proceeding from the sea drowns at times other sounds.

Jeanne (looking through the window panes at the rear, calling to her mother, who at the other end of the gallery is looking in the opposite direction).—Mother! Mother! Hurry. Here is something new!

Clotilde (after looking through her field glasses again).—I see nothing.
Jeanne.—Really? Follow with your glass along the hedge.

Clotilde (after a fresh inspection).—I have them! What eyes you have! I supposed the French were holding that corner.

Jeanne (in a tone of charitable superiority).—Mother, you make me feel sorry for you! You have not a bit of strategic instinct. Don't you see that Mme. Rochet's grounds are filled with white cuffs? The British are every where! (*The cannonading at sea becomes appalling. Enter MATHILDE and her daughter, AMÉLIE.*)

SCENE II

CLOTILDE, JEANNE, MATHILDE, AMÉLIE

Mathilde.—Dear friend, isn't this really too informal? To come to see people when the sun is scarcely up?

Clotilde (moving toward her and shaking her hand).—On the contrary, dear friend, too late! The performance began near midnight and is almost over. (*Embracing AMÉLIE while MATHILDE shakes the hand of JEANNE.*) Good morning, Amélie!

Amélie.—Good morning, madame! Permit me! (*She runs to the gallery in the rear.*) Where must one look?

Jeanne.—There isn't much left to see.

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Mathilde.— According to what we were told at Jossigny-by-the-Sea, the idea of the manœuvre is that an army from England is attempting to disembark on our coast.

Jeanne.— Yes. Fancy! These ships you see are the British flotilla. They are supposed to have landed an army corps on our coast. (*Interrupting herself to look at the armed men whose firing increases.*) What are they up to? What if they were fresh torpedoes?

Amélie.— You saw the torpedoes?

Jeanne.— A superb attack! I scarcely breathed!

Amélie.— And you think more are coming?

Jeanne.— No! False alarm!

Mathilde.— One thing I can't understand is the fact of their allowing the invaders to land. It would have been so easy for the soldiers to have prevented the boats from landing!

Clotilde.— There weren't any soldiers. The troops were mobilized a long way from here. The army trains were arriving all night.

Jeanne.— To prevent the landing there were exactly eight custom house officials, not another one! (*The sound of clarions is heard echoing from hill to hill all along the coast, and at the same instant, cannon and musketry, which toward the last had been going off at rarer intervals, now ceases completely.*)

Amélie.— What does that music mean?

Mathilde.— It is evidently the signal to stop firing, for it *does* stop.

Clotilde.— Ouf! (*They all return to the interior of the apartment.*) It seems quite strange not to hear that perpetual rumbling any more. My head has all gone to pieces, but, never mind, a sight like that is worth seeing. (*To JEANNE.*) What a pity your father was detained in Paris!

Jeanne (*laughing*).— On the contrary, I find it very lucky that he is away. The generals would have eaten him alive. After Monday's speech! Just think! The deputy who persuaded the chamber to reduce the war appropriation one fifth. The beplumed ones are not satisfied.

Mathilde.— Plenty of others are! What a success, dear friend! How much I must congratulate you. Some day you will be the wife of the president of the Republic, you will see! (*CHARLES brings a telegram to CLOTILDE. He waits, while his mistress opens and reads it.*)

Clotilde.— Oh! Children! What joy! Jeanne! Your father is coming.

Jeanne.— To-day, mother?

Clotilde.— This morning, at once. (*Reading the telegram.*) 'I hear at the Ministry that we are having some fine manœuvres along our coast.

THE BEAT OF THE WING

I leave at once and will arrive to-morrow morning in time to admire and receive our valiant soldiers. Hélène will be with me. Have the eight o'clock train met.' (To CHARLES.) Go to the stable and tell them to send to the station for monsieur. (CHARLES *exit*.)

Jeanne.—Hélène? Mother, who is she? We do not know any Hélène intimately.

Clotilde.—I do not know her any better than you do, but I know who she is. She is a young girl, without either father or mother, in whom your father is interested, and for whom I believe he is also guardian. I am told she is charming.

Jeanne.—My age?

Clotilde.—About your age, I think.

Jeanne.—Will she be here long?

Clotilde.—Her arrival is a surprise. I know nothing of her plans.

Jeanne.—If she is nice she will be a playfellow for me. (To AMÉLIE.) Will you go to the station with me? So many people talk to my father! You will prevent my being left alone with Hélène.

Amélie.—Will you let me, mother?

Mathilde.—Go along, we will wait to shake the orator's hand.

Clotilde (to JEANNE).—On your way tell the servants to prepare the end room for Miss Hélène. Hurry, or the carriage will leave without you.

Jeanne (to AMÉLIE).—Come along, let us make haste!

(JEANNE and AMÉLIE *leave*.)

SCENE III

CLOTILDE, MATHILDE

Clotilde.—Now we are alone. Tell me frankly what you think of my husband's speech.

Mathilde.—Mine thinks it a splendid speech, though rather dangerous.

Clotilde.—Dangerous for whom?

Mathilde (*surprised*).—Why! For the country! Whom else could it affect?

Clotilde.—The orator himself.

Mathilde.—I do not understand. The Chamber voted everything he wanted. His triumph is complete.

Clotilde.—It was not taken as well here as in Paris, and his electors are here.

Mathilde.—Yes, in our department the people are rather skittish in their patriotism.

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Clotilde.— Just think! The Saint Leger foundry, which turns out war material exclusively, employs more than ten thousand workmen. They are furious at my husband, whom they accuse of destroying their means of livelihood by reducing the war appropriation. You can imagine how our antagonists will take advantage of the opportunity and pour oil on the flames. A most atrocious article has already appeared in a local paper. If any more such insinuations come out, Bernard's position will be impossible to maintain.

Mathilde.— I did not know about the article. How was it atrocious?

Clotilde.— It brought to light the great misfortune that has stricken our family. It stirred up all that baneful past.

Mathilde.— I am at sea. What is there in Mr. Prinson's past?

Clotilde.— His brother.

Mathilde.— True! That odious Michel! For years his name has never entered my mind.

Clotilde.— We do everything to make the world forget it. This wretched speech has stirred up that evil memory. You can understand why I am troubled. When you bear the same name as that of a creature who cost his country so dear, you cannot speak with contempt of warlike virtues. One may look into the reduction in wine sales, the revenue tax, the clergy; but one must leave the army alone. Moreover, I'll wager that Bernard is sorry for his overflow of eloquence. His telegram proves it. You will read it to-morrow in the papers.

Mathilde.— It is very cleverly worded. It will make a good impression. (*Silence.*) What a scourge Michel is! Ten years since his death, and still he does harm!

SCENE IV

MATHILDE, CLOTILDE, JEANNE, AMÉLIE

The two girls rush in suddenly by the garden door. They appear much disturbed and out of breath from running.

Jeanne (to her mother, in a broken voice).— Mother! We could not go to the station. At the opening of the path we were stopped by a man — a horrible man — who frightened us so!

Clotilde.— Was he begging? Was he impudent? Did he threaten you?

Jeanne.— No, not exactly impudent — nor did he threaten either.

Amélie.— He isn't a beggar, he is nicely dressed.

Mathilde.— Well! What did he want?

Jeanne.— We do not know. We were almost upon him without seeing him, because he was seated in the grass at the extreme edge of the cliff! He

THE BEAT OF THE WING

must have been watching us for some time. I was ahead, all of a sudden he stood before me and for a good minute he stared me in the face. Then he asked me, 'Are you the daughter of Bernard Prinson?' He said it in such a way! We flew off like arrows and ran all the way home.

*Mathilde (pressing her hand over her daughter's brow).—*How hot you are! To put yourself in such a state for a trifle!

*Jeanne.—*If you had seen his face you would not say — 'for a trifle' — a face covered with scars, hacked up, lined, carved, and in it all a pair of eyes that looked as if they had been torn out and put back again by chance,— eyes burning with rage and fever. As to the man, I am convinced he'd knock down any opponent whatever with one hand. I never saw anything so hideous or so terrible.

*Clotilde (smiling).—*What a picture! And to think that no doubt it represents a very worthy man!

*Jeanne.—*As to that, indeed, mother, I could swear it does not! He cannot be a worthy man! (*The crunching of the gravel outside is heard as a carriage approaches.*)

*Clotilde.—*Your father! (*JEANNE exclaims joyfully and runs to the doorstep. At the same moment the glass door is opened and BERNARD PRINSON enters, followed by HÉLÈNE.*)

SCENE V

MATHILDE, CLOTILDE, JEANNE, AMÉLIE, BERNARD, HÉLÈNE

*Jeanne (throwing her arms around her father's neck).—*Father, let me salute you! (*She kisses him upon his right cheek.*) This for you! (*She kisses him on his left cheek.*) This for your beautiful speech!

*Clotilde (embracing her husband).—*Did you have a pleasant journey?

*Bernard (while a servant helps him off with his hat and coat, which he carries away with him).—*Excellent! I sleep in a car as well as in my bed. (*Motioning toward HÉLÈNE.*) Here is a young person who must be less rested, for she did not close her eyes all night. (*Taking HÉLÈNE by the shoulder and pushing her toward his wife.*) Let me introduce you. She is very sweet and can argue with great maturity. We talked very little last night in the dining-car, but I discovered that much.

*Clotilde (giving her hand to HÉLÈNE).—*Mademoiselle, you are welcome. I hope you will be happy here. (*HÉLÈNE bows timidly.*)

*Bernard (pushing HÉLÈNE toward JEANNE).—*Jeanne, I place her in your care. (*JEANNE smiles at HÉLÈNE and takes her a little aside, attempting meanwhile to converse. AMÉLIE joins them, after BERNARD, in passing, has given her a friendly shake of the hand.*)

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Mathilde (shaking BERNARD's hand).— You find the house invaded, not by the enemy, but by indiscreet friends. We have been here since dawn to see the battle.

Bernard.— Was it fine?

Clotilde.— Splendid! We spent the night at the window.

Bernard (laughing).— We shall discover shortly that after having made four hundred kilometers since last night I am the freshest of you all. (*After a pause he says to CLOTILDE*), I have news for you. After leaving the station I had the carriage stop at the mayor's, where I learned that we are to put up Colonel Hérouard, of the 170th infantry. He is coming at once.

Clotilde.— The troops, then, do not return to the garrison to-day?

Bernard.— No. The manoeuvres will last several days and the soldiers remain stationed in the neighborhood.

Jeanne (clapping her hands).— Oh! What luck! Another battle!

Bernard (smiling).— By Jove! The daughter of the most pacific of all the deputies indulging in such Valkyrie enthusiasm!

Clotilde (laughing).— The Valkyrie has just been sadly routed!

Jeanne (mortified).— Oh! Mother!

Clotilde.— What might be called a rout! (*To BERNARD.*) She started to go to meet you, and a hundred yards away from the house some old codger asks her if she is not the daughter of Bernard Prinson. Instead of replying she takes to her heels, and we were present at her anything but triumphal entry.

Jeanne.— If he had appeared to mother I should like to know what she would have done. That 'old codger' indeed. I defy any one to look at him and not be afraid.

Bernard (becoming very intent).— Old or young?

Jeanne.— He is so marked up it is not possible to tell. Not very old, at any rate.

Bernard.— After asking you if you were my daughter what else did he say?

Clotilde (laughing).— If he said anything more, she was far away. (*A servant appears and makes a sign to CLOTILDE.*) Coffee is served. If you will go into the dining-room (*to MATHILDE*). Dear friend, you must be dying of hunger after such an early start?

Mathilde.— Not at all. We breakfasted before leaving, and now that we have found our deputy in good health we are going to run away. I also have to receive some officers and I must see they are properly housed. I am putting up two lieutenants who, no doubt, will have comrades in the neighborhood, and I intend to ask all these young people to tea this afternoon. We shall have a little dance. Don't fail to come.

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Clotilde.—We accept with the greatest pleasure. (*MATHILDE and AMÉLIE shake BERNARD'S hand. CLOTILDE accompanies her visitors as far as the doorstep. BERNARD prevents JEANNE from following.*)

Bernard (to *JEANNE*).—Show Miss Froment to the dining-room and tell them to bring me my coffee here. I must speak to your mother.

Jeanne (to *HÉLÈNE*).—Come, let us both go. (*HÉLÈNE and JEANNE exeunt. At the same instant CLOTILDE returns.*)

SCENE VI

CLOTILDE, BERNARD

Bernard.—The man of whom Jeanne is so afraid, guess who it is!

Clotilde.—Who is it?

Bernard.—Michel!

Clotilde.—Your brother?

Bernard.—Yes.

Clotilde.—What makes you think so?

Bernard.—A line I received from him yesterday in which he announces his proposed visit. It is he!

Clotilde.—But he swore never to return to France.

Bernard.—First, he swore nothing of the kind, and, besides, oaths to him, you know —

Clotilde.—Yet, when he came back from Africa he was absolutely at your mercy. You ought to have taken advantage of it to bar his way.

Bernard.—How do you mean, 'to bar his way'?

Clotilde.—We were sure he was dead. The papers throughout the entire world had described his sufferings at length and counted the wounds on his dead body. An official notice of your brother's death had given you leave to inherit his fortune. Who compelled you to return it to him as you did? Nobody. One owes nothing to a corpse. I understood when we decided upon restitution that you took a formal guarantee.

Bernard.—You misunderstood. For two years we were sure of my brother's death, when a man named Rénaud wrote me from London that he was that brother, miraculously escaped from his executioners through numberless dangers. He told merrily — for this bad penny always has had a sense of humor — of his crossing as stoker in the steamboat carrying him to England, and of his battle with hunger during the first few months. It was the middle of winter, and he had had the luck to land during a week of heavy snowstorms and been engaged as an extra sweeper at a street crossing. After the thaw he was engaged as a scrubber in an office in the city, where,

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

thanks to his knowledge of the French language, he was promoted to the position of clerk. It is then that Mr. Rénaud, small employee in a London bank, wrote to me, for no other reason, I verily believe, than to show off his success in defying death. He asked nothing — nothing. His whole pride lay in his endurance in overcoming all things, even fate. At that time, my political prospects were growing and they had not greatly suffered from Michel's disgrace. He having paid for his treachery with his life, we were quits. At any price it was necessary to prevent him from coming to life again. I deposited to Mr. Rénaud's credit in London the equivalent of what I had inherited from my brother. Mr. Rénaud, touched by the proceeding, answered that Michel Prinson was dead. Mark that! He never promised not to appear in France. Michel dead, that's all.

Clotilde.— How does he dare to risk himself in France? If he gets caught, a pirate, an assassin, a traitor, it means the guillotine.

Bernard.— Not at all. His crime committed ten years ago is outlawed. That is doubtless what makes him bold enough to return. He can come and go without danger.

Clotilde.— Charming! All the danger is yours!

Bernard (smiling).— He would receive his share if he were recognized, for he would be treated like a mad dog. Just the same it would not prevent me from being in a nice scrape. The presence at my side of such a brother would be exploited in the choicest terms.

Clotilde.— All the more so, that Michel is arriving at a critical period. Your speech was a marvel. I congratulate you heartily. Yet I feel somehow that you went too far, and that in your particular position it would be better not to concern yourself with the army.

Bernard.— To whom are you talking? I have made myself the apostle of peace whom every one praises just the same as if my constituents did not earn their bread by manufacturing war implements.

Clotilde.— An enormous mistake, my friend!

Bernard.— But, heaven bless me! If you want to command great occasions you must learn how to lose sight of your own town clock for an instant. No danger, though, but there is a mistake! Since Monday I have been receiving mountains of letters and telegrams, all of them furious. The most formidable thing is the fact that all of them refer to Michel at precisely the moment when he reappears.

Clotilde.— Your correspondents are inspired by an odious article in *La Vigie*, unearthing your brother's whole history.

Bernard.— I read the article. Well, the harm is done; let us try to remedy it. I have already begun. As I passed through the town I stopped

THE BEAT OF THE WING

at the mayor's to ask them to allow me to put up one of the superior officers.

Clotilde (laughing).— You asked them! To Madame Renty you said you had been notified you were to put up.

Bernard.— Jingo! She does not have to be initiated into all my little secrets. (*A servant brings in a tray on which are coffee, rolls, and butter. During the remainder of the scene and the scene following BERNARD breakfasts very slowly.*) Yes, I asked for it and I did well, the clerk assured me that had I not requested it no one would have been sent to us. Well! We have the colonel! None of the generals stay at Jossigny. Had there been one, he would have been for us.

Clotilde.— I know a colonel who is going to be beautifully spoiled. If only your brother, by causing some scandal, does not ruin everything! He certainly runs great danger of being recognized. In the days of his glory his picture appeared in all the papers. His face was familiar. Besides, how many people saw him! At that reception, organized in his honor when he returned for the first time from Africa, millions of people crowded the Trocadéro. During the entire afternoon every one's eyes were riveted upon him. Because he was interesting, the rascal! Do you remember? When he almost fainted from emotion? From every woman's lips came a little cry of tenderness. Ah! He would not have found many cruel women that night in Paris. After having been for a whole day the idol of his country, how could he pass unnoticed?

Bernard.— Jeanne has just seen him face to face; did she recognize him? I have no fear on that score. When he announced his visit, he sent me his photograph to reassure me, and, indeed, he is not himself any more.

Clotilde.— Oh! Show me his picture!

Bernard.— After a while; it is in my valise. But here is the line I received. (*He pulls from his pocket an envelope which he hands to her.*)

Clotilde.— A card! He did not have much to say! (*Looking at the post mark.*) From Geneva. (*Drawing the card out of the envelope and reading:*) 'Mr. Rènaud desiring to have a talk with the deputy Prinson, proposes to spend the first fortnight of July at Jossigny-by-the-Sea, knowing by the papers that the Prinson family live there. He hopes that the fortnight will not elapse without his finding an occasion to meet Mr. Prinson, and he will have the honor to present himself several times at his door. He takes the liberty of sending his photograph, in order that Mr. Prinson may be entirely convinced that Mr. Rènaud's face will arouse no memories of a physiognomy odious to all good Frenchmen.' Always the same cynicism! Still, the tone is not threatening. The insistence with which he calls himself Rènaud, the care he takes in establishing the fact that he is unrecognizable, are good signs. But, in the end, what does he want?



FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Bernard.— I do not know, but whatever it is, one can be sure that he will make his request known without a vestige of family feeling causing his heart to beat at the idea of seeing us again. After reading those lines, my resolution was made at once to return; I did not wish to leave you alone, even for a day, with that pirate for a neighbor. And then, not knowing to what saint to confide myself, I took the bull by the horns, and brought his daughter.

Clotilde.— How do you expect to revive a paternal sentiment that never existed?

Bernard.— I hope for something quite different. His daughter, whom he did not want when she was a burden, perhaps he might welcome when she could be a comfort. Why, if Michel is suffering from loneliness, would it not occur to him to take this gentle, well brought up creature away with him?

Clotilde.— How would that help us?

Bernard (laughing).— First, to rid ourselves of her, and then, under such circumstances, to fear Michel less. A man who leads a life apart, hostile and indifferent to everything, is hard to approach in a critical situation. See how different, were he to come accompanied by Hélène! We would know through her what his plans were. We could negotiate through her, profit by her influence. Instead of treating with a kind of demon, I would be facing a rogue more or less like other men. Eh! When I hesitate to burden myself with Hélène! Do you remember? I might perfectly well have dispensed with that charge. My brother's natural daughter,— that would not count. But the curate of the village in which Hélène's mother had just died wrote me letter after letter. He compared me to Jean Jacques making foundlings of his family. Such tales as those are mines of blackmail. A democratic leader ought to be able to take his part in the discussion of live subjects, such as the legalized search for paternity, without risking unpleasant references. Rather against my will I did a worthy deed, and now I am repaid, since the presence of Hélène is, to a certain extent, a safeguard.

Clotilde.— Do not boast too much of your worthy deed. During the eight years since that child has been in boarding school have you ever asked three times to see her?

Bernard (laughing).— Certainly not more.

Clotilde.— As for me, I should have been glad to have done something for her, but you forbade it.

Bernard.— I considered any connection between her and my family useless and dangerous. Only an unknown danger now threatening me decided me to bring her into relationship with you.

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Clotilde.— I should like to avoid any mistakes. Tell me does she know that Michel is her father?

Bernard (quickly).— The devil, no! Be careful! Plenty of time to enlighten her, if Michel becomes interested. Moreover it will be Mr. Rênaud, never Michel.

Clotilde.— Well, in regard to her birth, what does she think?

Bernard.— Her mother and herself deserted at her birth by a father of whose name she is ignorant. Moreover, I have given her to understand that I watched over her education as president of a society for the protection of children.

Clotilde.— The girl is quite pretty, but her face has a hard look. Her character may be the sort not always easy to manage. If she is a bit queer it is no wonder, for she hasn't much to thank life for. What must she be thinking this minute? For eight years you leave her shut up, then all of a sudden you carry her off, drop her into a fine carriage, lead her into a charming villa. 'And this is my house! I hope you will be happy here! This is my wife, my daughter.' What a muddle in her brain! Didn't she ask you any questions while you were traveling?

Bernard.— It was I who questioned her. In spite of my preferences for secular education, I placed her with the sisters in the hope that at the end of her term she might take the veil. Those vocations are a good thing sometimes.

Clotilde.— Just now such a vocation would interfere with your plan of attaching her to Michel.

Bernard.— Neither do I now want the cloister for her. It is precisely to enlighten myself in regard to her tastes that I have been cleverly questioning her. Well! Fancy! Two years ago she really did think of taking the veil. But the curious part of it was she did not wish to enter the order of the sisters by whom she had been brought up.

Clotilde.— What order did she select?

Bernard.— I do not know. We were talking while at dinner and a colleague of the Chamber, who asked if he could sit at our table, ended our interview. Here she is. (*HÉLÈNE enters with JEANNE.*)

SCENE VII

CLOTILDE, BERNARD, HÉLÈNE, JEANNE

Jeanne (comes up to her father caressingly).— My dear old papa, let me embrace you again! (*As she leans over his shoulder she notices that his cup of coffee has scarcely been touched.*)— Why! Your cup is still full! You

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

haven't taken three mouthfuls! Was it so very important, what you had to say? Shall I have the coffee brought back? Yours is cold.

Bernard.— Let it alone! I shall have finished it in a moment.

Jeanne.— To begin with you shan't get in a single word, I have too many things to tell you. (*She continues to talk to him in an undertone.*)

Clotilde (to HÉLÈNE).— If my husband has neglected his breakfast it is I who am to blame. I asked him so many questions! You can fancy about whom? About you, dear young lady. I have wanted often to look you up. I was not able to, but the intention was there. Believe me — I should be glad to be of use to you. I will have to know you a little better for that. But I hope you will trust me and tell me everything.

Hélène.— I should be only too glad to do so, but what is there to tell? There never was a past as blank as mine.

Clotilde.— Perhaps not filled with events. And yet! I have just learned that two years ago you had thought of taking the veil. That is certainly an event in the life of the soul! Were you really decided?

Hélène.— Yes — almost.

Clotilde.— Of course you would have entered the convent in which you were educated?

Hélène.— No, I wished to join the order of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Clotilde.— Your dream, at eighteen, was then to take care of the aged and infirm?

Hélène.— My dream! Oh! Not at all! My will.

Clotilde.— But why?

Hélène.— I was not happy. I had lost my mother who loved me deeply, and her affection had never been replaced. No one about me realized how lonely I was. So it was very simple. When you cannot be comforted yourself you feel a desire to comfort others.

Clotilde.— Does that seem plain to you?

Hélène.— It seems to me that — to comfort or be comforted — either one will warm the heart.

Clotilde.— You gave it up. Why?

Hélène.— I feared I should not persevere in it all my life. I am not good enough.

Clotilde.— Must one be so phenomenally good?

Hélène.— Yes, in some ways. All sorts of things happen. Fancy, for instance, if among all the old men entrusted to my care an enemy of mine were to come some day.

Clotilde.— An enemy! You have one then?

Hélène.— Perhaps, madame.

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Clotilde.— You have no doubt of it, judging by your voice. What harm has been done you ?

Hélène.— My mother died of exhaustion from overwork — I grew up in a cellar.

Clotilde (embarrassed).— Then one must look close to you for —

Hélène.— Yes, very close.

Clotilde (thinking herself implicated).— Yet those whom you accuse —

Hélène.— I accuse one only — there! My father. If I recognized him, even overwhelmed with illness, I could not forgive him. A truly Christian spirit would manage to love him for God's sake.

Bernard (rising).— Come! Now I am well stocked! (*To JEANNE.*) Ring for them to remove the tray. (*JEANNE pushes an electric button.*)

Clotilde (to JEANNE).— Did you show Mademoiselle her room ?

Jeanne (smiling at HÉLÈNE).— Not yet; I am going to now.

Clotilde (to HÉLÈNE).— I selected a room for you from which you can see the open sea. I suppose that until you came here you had never seen the ocean ?

Hélène.— Even here, madame, I have not yet seen it.

Jeanne (laughing).— It's true, where could she have seen it? She came in a carriage by way of the town, and at table her back was turned to the window. (*Slipping her arm in a friendly manner through Hélène's, she drags her to the gallery at the right.*) Look! (*HÉLÈNE, dumb with admiration, gazes at the sea, which glimmers in the bright sunlight.*)

Clotilde.— Do you not think it beautiful ?

Hélène.— Yes.

Jeanne.— Did you expect such immensity ?

Hélène.— My eyes are unused to any horizon greater than four walls. The immensity does not enter in. I scarcely have the sensation of seeing. I have above all the sensation of being able — yes, of being able to glide over all that, for days and days.

Bernard (laughing).— You think she is discovering the ocean ? Not at all, she is discovering liberty! (*At the same instant JEANNE, much disturbed, points with her finger to an individual walking along by the garden fence.*)

Jeanne.— Father! There is the man who frightened me so! He is looking at the house. (*BERNARD rushes to see whom she means.*) There! — standing by the fence!

(*BERNARD, after a quick examination, joining CLOTILDE, talks to her in an undertone, while HÉLÈNE and JEANNE continue to watch the movements of the intruder.*)

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Bernard.— It is indeed he! Leave us alone! I will keep Hélène and Jeanne for a moment — on account of Hélène — to show her to him — that he may know she is his daughter.

Jeanne.— He is coming into the garden. He has seen us! He is coming!

Bernard (very calmly).— Well! Let him come! I know him. He is a very worthy man! (*CLOTILDE leaves. HÉLÈNE and JEANNE start to follow.*) No. You two remain. And if he attempts to talk to you, instead of evading him, be pleasant and trusting. Do you hear me, Hélène? (*As he pronounces the last words, he opens the front door and ushers in MICHEL, who appears tall, large, disfigured, horrible to behold. His face is at first half hidden by a broad-brimmed hat of soft felt pulled down over his eyes. When he has taken three strides into the room he removes it and the scars upon his brow are no longer concealed.*)

SCENE VIII

BERNARD, JEANNE, HÉLÈNE, MICHEL

Michel (very jovial, without stretching out his hand to BERNARD, presenting himself).— It is Mr. Rénaud! Good morning!

Bernard (without taking a step toward him and in a dull, even voice).— Good morning, Mr. Rénaud. This is my daughter, Jeanne.

Michel (always in the same buoyant tone).— Ah! Yes! She is not too angry with the great blockhead who frightened her? This time, eh! No way of hiding! Look at me well, Mademoiselle Jeanne! (*She looks him square in the face.*) Aha! That's good! Some progress has been made! (*Turning to HÉLÈNE.*) And this one — has she also regained her courage? Ah! But! I've made a mistake! (*To JEANNE.*) She is not the one you were with a short time ago?

Jeanne.— No, indeed.

Bernard (importantly).— I present you to Mademoiselle Hélène Froment.

Michel (struck by a memory).— Wait a minute! Froment! I know that name! I must have met the young lady before. (*HÉLÈNE makes a simple motion of denial.*) Yes, mademoiselle — but you were too small. You could not have formed an opinion about me. (*To BERNARD.*) I am in particularly good luck. The family united. Yet Madame Prinson is missing.

Bernard (nonplussed).— My wife is well, thank you! (*Motioning to JEANNE to retire with HÉLÈNE.*) My children, I must speak with Rénaud. (*HÉLÈNE and JEANNE leave, after a bow to MICHEL.*)

THE BEAT OF THE WING

SCENE IX

BERNARD, MICHEL, *then* CHARLES

Bernard (much disturbed).— You, here, Michel!

Michel (jeering).— Ah! You are very familiar with Mr. Rénaud!

Bernard.— Enough comedy. If you wish to converse, do so seriously.

Michel.— You are right; the best jokes are the shortest ones. From now on I am myself.

Bernard (anxious).— Only with me, however.

Michel.— Ah! Ah! Rénaud for the gallery and Michel for you. You are right to explain the difference; otherwise I'll be blessed if, to the first person entering —

Bernard.— Yes, or no, are you here to make trouble for me?

Michel (amiably).— What do you think! What pleasure should I derive from making you trouble?

Bernard.— You have a way of speaking —

Michel.— Don't notice it. I am no longer in the habit — that is to say, I remain weeks, months, without speaking to any one, and when I find people to listen to they are not duchesses. Trouble? Drat it, no! You are too worthy a man! I arrive and who do I see established at your fireside, treated like your own daughter? Mine! She whom I rather shabbily deserted with her mother some time ago. Do you also house the mother?

Bernard.— She is dead.

Michel.— Too bad! That woman once loved me. It would be an amusing experience to meet one of my past flames. To run to her with outstretched arms and cry, 'I am your adored Michel!' (*Laughing heartily.*) With such a mug, eh! What say you?

Bernard (revolted).— What do I say? Listen! When you wrote me from England you had been saved I preferred not to answer. You asked for no news and out of a kind of pity I recoiled from giving you the news I had. I opened an account for Mr. Rénaud, you acknowledged receipt of the same, we stopped there. But in the face of your impudence, I feel like showing you the havoc you have wrought. Two months after the history of your rebellion was published in Europe, our mother died of a broken heart. Yes, it can be proven, solely of that, for till that disaster her health could not have been better. As to our father, it is still more sad. You were his favorite. As long as it was a question of your promotion, of your campaigns, of your fame, his eyes would shine. One day he came into my room while I was writing and spread a paper out before me. With his

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

finger he pointed to some headlines — “Central Africa. Revolt of a French officer” — Then I began the horrible article in which each line described a crime. The expedition commanded by Michel Prinson accused of atrocities; villages burned, women, children murdered, prisoners crammed with dynamite cartridges which were then exploded. A second expedition sent in search of the first column of evil fame. The history of the ambush prepared by you. The massacre of all the whites! The heroic end of the colonel who fell beneath the shells while crying out the promise of pardon. When I reached the end my father made a sign for me to be still.* He walked out without having opened his lips. Never again did he pronounce your name. He dragged on for months with some strange ailment. One morning he was found dead in bed. We succeeded in suppressing the fact that he had taken poison! (*A long silence.*)

Michel.— The poor old people! Very sad! Pah! When a cankerous fruit drops from the tree does the remaining fruit complain? They ripen all the better. Why are human beings less clever? And, moreover, am I to be responsible for all the inaccuracies they have published about me? For instance, the orgies of cannibalism — pure invention! The truth was I sometimes grubbed with my blacks as it was customary for a chief to do — you cannot imagine all the queer things that simmered in that stew — crocodile, snake, parrot. Sometimes I’d pull out bits of monkey — from afar one might have mistaken the shape. There again! That story about a missionary and three nuns who carried on a small mission school at the frontier of the desert whom I am supposed to have seized and dragged about for hundreds of miles, in order to abandon them finally in the bush after the grossest ill treatment — nothing more untrue. To begin with I left the missionary perfectly undisturbed at his post. What could I have done with him? As to the nuns, they were set free the very next day and entrusted to a caravan that was to pass right in front of their school. All my deeds have been enlarged, distorted to suit the fancy. I admit one: to have laid the snare in which those people perished — that, yes — that was a blasted trick! And I might say much more besides — (*interrupting himself*). Come now, come now! upon my word, I am excusing myself. A little more and I’d be begging for pardon! And you who are giving yourself the airs of a judge! No, that’s too good a joke! I cleaned up those people because they were coming to take my power from me, and over there power is worth clinging to. To command in a wild country! Ah! My children! That is what can be called holding trumps! To be a nigger king and hold a feast to the beat of the tom-tom! To smoke one’s pipe in one’s harem like a horse gyp in his stable, a stable swarming with women who are fine, bold,

*Michel
Epi*

THE BEAT OF THE WING

and tractable animals that one selects, feels, takes, or leaves. And the hunt! The killing of zebra or antelope, lion hunts, elephant hunts, gorilla or negro hunts, in the vastness of a forest of which you feel you are sovereign. Fancy any one coming to disturb me in there when my guns are ready to go off! Oh! The poor creatures!

Bernard.— You killed your parents and this is how you receive the news of their death!

Michel.— I weep for neither father nor mother, for I was dead before them. You do not weep before a grave if you yourself are in that grave. Certainly I've always been a miscreant, but not to the extent of having only a pebble in the place of a heart. Even at the time when I was murdering women and children I still had hours of emotion. I can tell you the exact moment everything that was sensitive in me became suppressed. You see, you may say that the flag is nothing but a rag — rag as much as you please, but from the instant I drew upon it I realized there were no longer for me either parents or friends anywhere upon the earth: one way of being dead.

Bernard.— In spite of myself I pity you.

Michel.— Keep your pity! I have no use for it! The dead have a kind of happiness that takes the place of everything. They have absolute independence. I am free! Not free like a citizen of a country with legislation more or less severe. My liberty is that of the pariah who no longer respects nor considers anything! Do you know under what curious circumstances that first intoxication of liberty was revealed to me?

Bernard.— You have just said — it was when you first gave the order to fire on your flag.

✓ *Michel.*— Not at all! Then I had only the sense of a complete break with society. The idea that joy could come out of that rupture came much later, and in this way: You know that after my rebellion I continued to lead for several weeks the life of a pasha; up to the day when my subjects, feeling I was no longer upheld by France, were, in their turn, angered and murdered me. But they only half succeeded! Brutes that hack you up and see your body covered with a mass of blood in which the whole human form is effaced and then think the man annihilated! My body was left exposed for hours under the broiling sun to the mercy of swarms of flies. When night came, I dragged myself far from the huts. For months I lived in the bush, wandering by night, sleeping by day. At last, after having walked northward a long, long time, I fell upon a nomad band of Tovaïegs, and was carried off a captive. For days they dragged me over the sands attached by the neck to the tail of a camel. Well, it was at that moment that I was for the first time drunk with freedom! Yes, with a rope around my neck and the bare end

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

of a camel for an horizon. The truth is liberty is not without, but within us, and in attempting to follow the great strides of the camel, I felt breathing within me a new happiness born of solitude.

Bernard (sarcastically).— A relative solitude.

Michel.— You are a great deal more lonely between an Arab who is lashing you with a whip and a camel jerking you suddenly along, than you are in the vastness of a desert! Since that journey I have never ceased to be at the mercy of rather cruel occurrences. In London I slept under bridges, my stomach empty, on the coldest nights. I was gay! I am still. Mr. Rénaud has no mistress. After loving those who have been raped, he now loves those who can be bought. Mr. Rénaud has no friends. Mr. Rénaud hasn't even relations. Very few people could bear to lead the life led by Mr. Rénaud. Some would die of melancholia. Others would go and bury themselves in a monastery where at least one can say "brother" to a friar. I, not only do I bear the blow, but I bear it with gladness. To be overwhelmed and rise afresh with indomitable will produces happiness.

Bernard (sarcastically).— A happiness that consists of being proud not to have been overcome by trouble.

Michel.— I agree! I am not what might be called happy. Imperturbable is more the term.

Bernard.— You— imperturbable! Why, passion bursts forth at every word!

Michel.— Where do you find passion? I reach here a bit nervous on account of a meeting —

Bernard.— Who upset you, you the imperturbable man! Whom did you meet?

Michel.— Probably the only thing in the world that could still move me! The village is full of troops, and at a street corner I suddenly faced it — that bit of tricolored rag! I took another turn. Oh! Well, drat it! It isn't to bore you with trash that I made this journey.

Bernard.— You are neither son, brother, kindred, nor friend, yet you are still a soldier!

Michel.— No, thanks! I cannot think without disgust of military slavery. You don't understand my trouble.

Bernard.— Very well. Let us speak of something else. You came to say something to me; say it.

Michel.— No, not now. It isn't time, or rather you made a mistake not to have asked me as soon as I put foot in your house. I have no longer any family and you recited a sermon to the prodigal son! No longer a

THE BEAT OF THE WING

country and you made me speak like a conscript. My mind is elsewhere. Good by. I'll return. (CHARLES enters.)

Charles.—An orderly is here on a bicycle. He says the colonel will be here shortly.

Bernard (to CHARLES).—Tell madame she may come down. (Exit CHARLES.) It is the colonel who is to put up here. If you wish to return this afternoon I will be at your disposal whenever you wish.

Michel.—Very well. Are you free at three o'clock?

Bernard.—Yes. I hear Clotilde.

Michel.—Would it annoy you to have me speak to my sister-in-law? Of course if she does not know who I am.

Bernard (after a short hesitation).—She believes you dead. Remain if you like. (CLOTILDE enters, having changed her gown.)

SCENE X

BERNARD, MICHEL, CLOTILDE

Bernard (to his wife, after a vague motion of introduction).—Mr. Rénaud. (CLOTILDE bows awkwardly, very much embarrassed.)

Michel (in a most amiable tone).—I have been living abroad for so many years that the sight of the manœuvres which are of so much interest to every one is particularly so to me. The sight of French uniforms gives me a feeling of something new.

Clotilde.—You will be able to look at a uniform at close range; we are expecting Colonel Hérouard at any moment.

Michel.—Hérouard! By Jove! He isn't an ordinary creature!

Clotilde.—You know him?

Michel.—Personally, no. Where should I have had the opportunity to meet him? By reputation who does not know him? His campaign in the Soudan was marvelous. He is a brave man! (The sound of a distant band is heard intermittently.)

Bernard.—Listen! A marching regiment, with a band leading. All the troops have not yet been assigned. (The stamping of horse's hoofs is heard outside, followed by a sound of voices.) Eh! What have we here? (BERNARD and CLOTILDE both go to the glass door.)

Clotilde (reaching it first).—It's the colonel!

Bernard (quickly, behind her).—Is there some one there to hold his horse?

Clotilde.—Yes, his orderly is there! Ring quickly that he may be shown to the stable! (BERNARD runs to an electric button on the left, near

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

the front of the stage.) The colonel does not know where to go; show yourself! (BERNARD after ringing, rushes out on the doorstep. During the first part of the following scene a military band which has only been heard intermittently now grows louder and finally the tune can be distinguished.)

SCENE XI

BERNARD, MICHEL, CLOTILDE, HÉROUARD, then CHARLES, then JEANNE, then HÉLÈNE

Bernard (outside on the doorstep calling).— This way, Colonel!

Clotilde (behind the door, hastily and without turning round, to MICHEL, who stands with his arms crossed near the glass panels, not far behind her).— Should a woman say 'Colonel,' or 'My Colonel,' according to French custom?

Michel (roughly).— I don't know. (*A shadow passes over CLOTILDE's face, but she smiles again immediately and moves to the doorstep, while BERNARD, from without, is making himself polite to the COLONEL.*)

Clotilde (in a hospitable and sympathetic tone).— Colonel, do come in! It is so hot outside! (*The COLONEL appears, in full uniform. He salutes in military fashion, heels together, then shakes CLOTILDE's hand, which is outstretched. BERNARD enters behind him. At the same time CHARLES appearing from within stops near BERNARD, awaiting orders.*)

Bernard (to CHARLES).— What is it?

Charles.— Did not monsieur ring?

Bernard.— You're right. I had forgotten. Show the colonel's orderly the way to the stable. (*Pointing to the front door.*) That way — quick! (*Raising his voice.*) And tell them to take great care of the horse. (*The servant goes out by the garden.*)

Clotilde.— Such a beautiful creature! I was looking at it a while ago. So high strung — so — the eyes of a gazelle! You must know, Colonel, I am mad about everything military. I passed a portion of the night at this window with my daughter. We could not drag ourselves away from the sight of battle. On what side was your regiment?

Hérouard.— There; you can see very well from here the spot we defended nearly all the time. (*He takes a step toward the gallery and comes face to face with MICHEL. He stops, sees the scarred face of MICHEL and bows.*)

Clotilde (obliged to introduce MICHEL and with visible reluctance).— Mr. Rénaud. (*Michel returns a swift bow to the COLONEL: the COLONEL makes a motion to offer his hand when CLOTILDE passes quickly between the two men and drags the COLONEL to the window.*) Where did you say it was, Colonel?

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Hérouard.— From three to five in the morning my sharpshooters were stationed along the hedge of those grounds, half way up the coast above Jossigny. You see, to the left of the big white house! (*The military band, which for the last few minutes has not been heard, suddenly bursts out in an inspiring march.*)

Bernard.— How does a regiment happen to be here?

Hérouard (laughing).— Rest assured, Sir Deputy, you have but the colonel to house. But when one receives the colonel one also puts up the flag. It is a company of the 170th which, headed by the band, is escorting the flag to your house. To-morrow, with the same formality, they will return for it. (*JEANNE, entering by way of the gallery, runs hurriedly to the middle of the room.*)

Jeanne (out of breath).— They are bringing the flag. The colonel's orderly says that — (*She perceives she is standing before the COLONEL and stops, embarrassed.*)

Hérouard (smiling, bows before her).— Your mother told me that you take the utmost interest in military operations. I see she did not exaggerate. As an officer, permit me to congratulate you. (*He extends his hand, in which she places her own, and leaving the COLONEL she finds herself beside her father.*)

Jeanne (to BERNARD, in an undertone).— I might do well to call Miss Froment. She was sorry to have missed the battle in the night.

Bernard.— Yes, do so. (*Jeanne rushes out quickly. The band has been steadily approaching. It stations itself before the door, where it stops playing suddenly. JEANNE returns, red and out of breath, followed by HÉLÈNE.*)

Jeanne (laughing and pointing to HÉLÈNE).— I met her on the stairs. She could understand nothing of all this noise, and was seeking a spot from which she could see the assault upon the house. (*Moving to the front door.*) Can one look?

Hérouard.— Why not? I am proud to present my men to you. Just look at them after an eight-hour march! (*Saying thus the COLONEL motions to JEANNE, and then to HÉLÈNE to come out on the doorstep. CLOTILDE starts to follow. As soon as she has glanced outside she returns hastily to her husband.*)

Clotilde.— There is a crowd! The whole population is there. Show yourself. It will have an admirable effect.

Bernard.— At once — (*looking around him*).— A hat! (*Hastily running about the room.*) — I must have a hat, quick!

CLOTILDE (hunting with him).— I do not see any. Why not go hatless? It isn't the kind of weather to give you a cold.

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Bernard (exasperated).—To the devil with colds. It is to salute the flag! (*Detaching his syllables.*) To sa-lute the flag.

Michel (going to him).—Here is mine. (*He hands him his hat.*)

Bernard (seizing it feverishly).—Never mind! Thank you! (*He puts it on and rushes out.* During the preceding remarks various military orders were being given, the last distinctly: *Right shoulder. Shift arms! Then a pause, while the captain salutes with his sword the flag that faces the band. Then in a loud clear voice the command is given: 'To the flag!' Clarions and drums beat and ring. The band plays. At the very instant the march bursts forth, BERNARD appears on the doorstep. He pushes aside those present and well in sight of the crowd he is seen removing his hat with a large and solemn sweep, and holds it aloof all the time the band plays. It ceases. The honors have been done. The flag bearer, escorted by two under-officers, starts up the steps. As he passes beside BERNARD, the latter, in a loud voice, cries: 'It is the pride of France that is crossing my threshold!' Bravos by the crowd. Numerous shouts of 'Hurrah for the army! Hurrah for France!' MICHEL, during the saluting of the flag, has remained alone, half seated upon a table in the middle of the apartment, his back to the front door, arms crossed, looking around vaguely. On the arrival of the flag bearer, he gives a start, turns suddenly and finds himself in the presence of the flag. The officer bearing it, uncertain as to which way to proceed, and finding himself still far from those who have been delayed without by the crowd, addresses MICHEL.*

SCENE XII

The same. THE FLAG BEARER

The Flag Bearer (to MICHEL).—Excuse me, sir—the colonel's room—which way do I go?

Michel (roughly).—I don't belong to the house.

Bernard (quickly).—This way—they will show you (*calling*). Jeanne! Jeanne! Show monsieur the colonel's room.

Jeanne.—If you will come, sir—(*She moves away, followed by the FLAG BEARER.*)

Hérouard (laughing, to JEANNE, who disappears).—It is for the sake of the country, mademoiselle!

(MICHEL, while attention is concentrated on the flag, rushes to the garden like a madman. His departure is remarked by none of the assistants except HÉLÈNE, against whom he pushes in his haste. During this time the COLONEL discourses.) The flag, in a room, is a glorious companion, but rather in the way, for we have orders to rest the pole horizontally across the back of two

THE BEAT OF THE WING

chairs in such a way that the material falls vertically without making any creases. All this takes up a lot of room.

Bernard.— Why not place it in a corner, quite simply ?

Hérouard.— Out of economy. That it may last as long as possible. The principal object is to prevent creases. (*The FLAG BEARER returns, crosses the hall without speaking, joins the two subofficers remaining by the door and leaves with them. Immediately afterward military commands are given. The band departs, the regular march of their retreating steps being heard.*)

Clotilde (to BERNARD, in an undertone).— I no longer see Mr. Rénaud.

Bernard.— What! (*Looking about him.*) Gone! Pah! (*Pointing to the hat which is still in his hand.*) His hat! (*Giving it to JEANNE.*) There! Run quickly to the servant's hall and have a man on a bicycle despatched with it.

Clotilde.— But if he went by the cliffs ?

Bernard.— Not at all. He will be found behind the soldiers.

Hérouard.— You are speaking of Mr. Rénaud ?

Bernard.— Yes — we were surprised — he has departed!

Hérouard (suddenly).— What is he ?

Bernard.— Why — an old friend. He comes rarely.

Hérouard.— Excuse my indiscretion. I did not ask because — an old officer, isn't he ?

Bernard (deeply annoyed).— He! What an idea! He is the most pacific of men!

Hérouard.— Who has received bullets full in the face! If he isn't an old officer he is certainly in bad luck!

ACT II

SCENE I

MICHEL, HÉLÈNE.

HÉLÈNE seated in the gallery. She holds a book which she does not read and looks out dreamily to sea. MICHEL arrives at the left. He approaches HÉLÈNE noiselessly. Suddenly she realizes that a man is behind her and is watching her, then she rises with a little cry of fright and recognizes MICHEL.)

Michel.— As frightened as that ?

Hélène (half laughing, half gasping).— I was not expecting —

Michel (calmly).— Even when expecting it, the effect of my mug is not spoiled. (*HÉLÈNE endeavors to move away.*) Well! Where are you going ?

Hélène.— To let Mr. Prinson know that you are here.

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Michel.— You will do nothing of the kind. I just came into the garden on the side that has no gate, and while I was vaulting the fence he was looking at me from an upper window.

Hélène.— Then you did not come by the high road ?

Michel.— No, across country; I have time to lose. (*A silence.*) What did they say this morning when they noticed that I had gone off without my hat ?

Hélène.— Without your hat ?

Michel.— Ha! Ha! You didn't take in the trick about the hat ? That's good; that's a sign that no one noticed my sudden disappearance.

Hélène.— Yes — but they did a little — the colonel asked if you weren't an old officer.

Michel (*mutters between his teeth*).— Ah! He has an eye, the wretch. (*A silence.*) What did they answer ?

Hélène.— 'No.' Of course.

Michel.— 'Of course,' amuses me! Why, of course ?

Hélène.— I spoke without thinking, I assure you!

Michel (*sarcastically*).— I doubt it! Well, what is your real opinion — an officer or not ?

Hélène.— I went into the convent eight years ago, when my mother died; I came out of it last evening for the first time. What can I know ?

Michel.— Eight years in a box without vacations, nor getting off ?

Hélène.— Not a day!

Michel.— That's pretty smart! Why was it precisely yesterday that you were let out ? (*HÉLÈNE gazes at him in surprise and does not reply.*) Very well — I am meddling in things that do not concern me, eh ? (*Becoming animated.*) Eh! Go to! Say it to my face! I rather like things sent me full in the face.

Hélène.— How can I interest you ?

Michel.— You do not interest me. (*Striking his chest.*) But one creature in the world can boast of interesting me. And the bit of news I ask might be of use to him. Do you give a hang — ?

Hélène.— I should be glad to be of service to you.

Michel.— Ah! Little lady, that is a pretty speech for which you will be at once rewarded. I am going to make you a present — a real present, since you are blessed with teeth and nails. Did you know that Bernard Prinson had a brother ?

Hélène.— Yes.

Michel.— It was your mother who told you, eh ? When you were a child!

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Hélène.— She! No, never did she mention the name of any Prinson before me, neither deputy nor otherwise. It was the mother superior at the convent at which I was educated. Once she asked me if the deputy who paid my expenses was related to an officer who after having rebelled was massacred by his accomplices. By my expression she realized I knew nothing about it, so she related all the facts.

Michel.— All! In a few words, I dare say! All! Oh! I wish I had them in the bush, those wretches who terrorize little girls with their bogey-man stories! Yes, in the bush to teach them! Well, then, you know in general what he did, this brother of Bernard Prinson! See here, I am that brother! I am Michel Prinson! (*He stops, waiting for some sign of reproach or terror. HÉLÈNE, quite calm, remains with eyes fixed upon him.*) A murderer! Worse than a murderer! Should I mention my name, at the end of the world, no matter where, they will move away from me as from the plague. You cannot fathom how low I have fallen.

Hélène (slowly).— On the contrary, I understand better than any one.

Michel.— And you listen to me — as good as gold! Don't I horrify you?

Hélène.— Not at all! Rebellion is of all crimes the one I most excuse.

Michel (laughing).— I laugh because you speak of crimes with the assurance of an old magistrate. See here! Your weakness for rebellion is appalling! At your convent did you feel like cutting the sisters' throats?

Hélène.— Oh! Come now!

Michel.— Then, whom do you hate?

Hélène.— I don't know. Everybody.

Michel.— You mean the organization of things; society. The word makes you open your eyes! I'll bet that your teachers didn't use it often!

Hélène.— Never! Yes, I do bear much ill will to society. It made me grow up in prison.

Michel.— Well! Thanks to me you have the chance not to return. I pass over my secret to you with full liberty to shout it out on the house tops. I live the life of a foreigner — I call myself Rénaud — I associate with human beings only at an eating house or a tavern — even then not often! If a little girl starts to tell in France that Michel Prinson isn't dead, how can that trouble my digestion? My brother, however, is not such a philosopher. He is a politician, therefore a trembler! He quakes at the very notion of my resurrection. If ever you wish to render those who forgot you in a convent for eight years, more attentive, I furnish you with the means. Nice, am I not? Will you still hesitate to explain to me why it was yesterday, particularly yesterday, and not two months ago or a week hence, that you were delivered from your long captivity?

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Hélène.— I myself have wondered; I can find no motive. But one thing did strike me and that is that Mr. Prinson advised both his daughter and myself to be very nice and confiding with you. He seemed to address himself especially to me.

Michel (to himself).— Exactly! Exactly!

Hélène.— You see, I obey; I am confiding.

Michel.— And nice, very nice! (*A silence.*) Did you care for the convent?

Hélène.— No.

Michel.— Such a stupid question. You said ‘prison.’ Aside from that, your teachers must have been good enough sort of people?

Hélène.— Yes.

Michel.— You could find comrades to play with, laugh with, when needful argue with —

Hélène.— Not always. My comrades had families. I, as I told you, had lost my mother. As to my father, do not let us speak of him, it is better so! During vacation time I was left alone.

Michel.— Then it was ennui — gloomy ennui!

Hélène.— Oh! very gloomy. Especially when I was little. To wander alone for six weeks in that huge, deserted school seemed frightful to me! The very time which brought so much joy to the other children made me weep with sadness. When I got older I learned to conquer my state of mind rather better, but I was no happier thereby.

Michel.— What worried you later?

Hélène.— I suffered at being educated by charity.

Michel (sarcastically).— For the charity done unto you!

Hélène.— It was probably because I could not feel touched by it that it became unbearable! I succeeded in getting rid of it!

Michel.— How?

Hélène.— When before taking me away Mr. Prinson wished to settle for my expenses I said coldly to him: ‘No, you owe nothing. I have reached an age no longer to live on charity. For two years I looked after the younger ones in exchange for my indebtedness. It was true, and I had prepared an enormous joy for myself when the day came to make my little speech —

Michel.— Did it create a sensation?

Hélène.— Not in the least. Your brother smiled and spoke of something else.

Michel.— The beast! It isn’t to be complimentary, but I can’t help noticing that our returns are much alike. In order to owe no man anything

THE BEAT OF THE WING

you washed brats' faces, and I swept street crossings; two similar occupations. Soon you will learn to your sorrow that when you earn your bread there is something else lacking. One is obliged to fight for happiness inch by inch. When I returned from Africa I first considered carefully how not to die of hunger, and after that, drat it! I had to stave off boredom exactly like a child at large in a great deserted school.

Hélène.— I know a little girl who more than once leaned out of the dormitory window with the temptation of breaking herself to pieces on the pavement below. But they painted such a gruesome picture to her of the fires of hell that, although without much belief in it, still she did not dare risk an eternity of suffering. Since our natures are alike, you must have felt the same?

Michel (laughing).— More or less!

Hélène.— Then hell gave you also food for thought?

Michel.— Oh! As for me, the devil doesn't frighten me! No! Each time I was on the point of blowing out my brains what held me back was a kind of hope — Do not ask me what I expected. In my mouth the idea would seem simply absurd. Yet, it decided me to go on living. And so, no matter how, on I'd go. If I were to tell you that on a Christmas night when I was feeling particularly forsaken in the midst of so many joyous people, I ordered for my dinner an omelet with rum, not because I care especially for the dish, but because that little flame dancing before my eyes seemed to live. It was company,— comforting. One is idiotic sometimes!

Hélène.— I don't call that being idiotic.

Michel.— True; it isn't if it can get you out of your trouble! Look here! Since you understand the charm of that small flame, I am going to teach you another way of getting companionship. You invent characters and write at their dictation. It is my greatest resource! Those people speak, act, love, quarrel, make up, all beneath my eyes. I burn with their intense passion. For weeks I weep, I laugh, I suffer, I hope with them. It is more complicated, more ridiculous than the omelet: but like the omelet it is company.

Hélène.— If you write for weeks, in the end you must have a real play?

Michel.— No! I would not have the art or the patience to finish such a work. Michel Prinson, playing the guitar by moonlight and showing off marionettes! It is only a pastime, nothing more. I open the door to phantoms and to compel myself to listen to them I take down their words. Perhaps if I disciplined my manikins, if I attempted to shut them up in a drama, I would frighten off the last friends that still deign to visit me. (*A pause.*) How did the idea of a play occur to you?

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Hélène (laughing).— At the convent I was an actress! For instance, on the feast of Saint Sophia, patron saint of the school, they played 'The Son of the Prince.' I took the part of a sorceress, a horrible part, which they did not wish to give to the daughter of rich parents.

Michel.— 'The Son of the Prince.' What black irony it must be! In spite of that, was there applause?

Hélène.— A great deal.

Michel (with shining eyes).— What! When you finished your tirades and a thunder of applause greeted you throughout the hall — didn't you feel a bit of a thrill there? (*He puts his hand on his heart.*)

Hélène.— No thunder of applause greeted me. Characters that are loathed receive none.

Michel.— Too bad! You lost the chance of making the acquaintance of the one thing that is worth the trouble of dying for.

Hélène.— What's that? You speak as if you knew it well.

Michel.— Better than merely knowing it! I touched it, really touched it! It was on my return from my first African campaign. In the papers and reviews they were not afraid to print that I had a genius for war. Without money, almost disowned by my superiors, with half-savage followers, I had discovered a new world. I arrived with a reputation ahead of me for the wildest bravery! To welcome me, the Geographical Society, in conjunction with the government organized a great reception in the big hall of the Trocadéro. The president of the Republic was there, and around him ministers, generals, scientists, artists — everybody who was anybody in the country. When I entered a religious silence fell. They wanted to see! And suddenly they saw. Upon the platform a pale young man, with the scar on his forehead you can still see there now (*he points to a white line across his brow.*) Only it was fresh — it shone like a red cockade. Then out of that human furnace full of a seething fever engendered by me, a great roar burst forth. My name! On those millions of lips nothing but my name! At that moment I was far from earth. An eagle of the mountain tops, the eagle bearer of the thunderbolt had swooped down upon me and had carried me with one great beat of its wing, so high that beneath my eyes the crowd sank into an abyss, out of which forever one name mounted — mine! (*Hélène bursts into tears.*) Well! What! You are weeping?

Hélène.— You have been all that — you!

Michel.— Yes, as you see me. And the soul I had on that day, in spite of my fall, I can find again within me.

Hélène (sobbing).— I can feel it, indeed! That is what makes me weep!

Michel.— Really?

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Hélène.— It makes me understand how much you are to be pitied.

Michel.— I'll be hanged if I thought that there was a creature living who would be touched by any of my ills.

Hélène.— Oh yes, believe it!

Michel.— I can then before I die share in the emotion of some one else! Perhaps for one minute be in sympathy with another human being! And that because a long time ago I touched that incomparable thing we were speaking about!

Hélène.— At least tell me the name of that thing?

Michel.— Why, glory, little stupid!

Hélène.— Glory! I supposed it only existed in fabulous epochs. At the time of Cæsar and Alexander. As to fancying that I should meet with it in life! It's the first time I ever thought of it!

Michel.— At your age I had already started in pursuit of it. She it was whom I saw shining at the end of all my tramps in the wilds; and on the day when a fool came to plant himself between me and her, I crushed him! Yes, it was from longing to be too great that I fell so low. But there is nothing to prove that I shall not rebound all the higher. Here, my child, you asked why I didn't blow my brains out. Solely because I undertook to transform my disgrace into glory. (*Pointing to the beach hidden from the spectators.*) See those people at our feet. So small that they look no larger than rats. They are snail pickers, seekers after wreckage, eaters of rotten fish! Well! In appearance they are much nearer to glory than I am. In spite of that I shall have it. (*Perceiving his brother, who has just entered the gallery and is watching him, as well as his companion, with lively curiosity.*) Here is my illustrious brother.

SCENE II

HÉLÈNE, MICHEL, BERNARD

Bernard.— May one hear of what you are talking so intently?

Michel.— I am giving this young girl a performance. We were looking up recipes for driving away boredom. I was boasting of the charm of day dreams, and I awoke to find myself dreaming aloud.

Hélène.— Such a beautiful dream!

Bernard.— Well, then, I don't happen to have come at the wrong time, since I am able to suggest a means of diversion. Hélène, my wife wishes you to be told that she and my daughter are going to tea at Mme. Renty's. The young officers of the 170th will be there. There will be dancing. It will be very gay. These ladies are about to go, if you care to join them you had better start at once.

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Hélène (glancing at her skirt).— With my boarding school gown I look like I know not what!

Bernard.— Oh, but they will give you a chance to change, by Jove!

Hélène.— I have nothing else to put on —

Bernard.— If that's all, my daughter will lend you whatever you want to make yourself beautiful.

Hélène.— Frankly, I'd rather go togged out as I am — but I am not in the mood and I shall remain —

Michel.— Are you shy?

Hélène.— Give me a little time to accustom myself and I will become very bold. To-day I still feel strange. I would arrive there like an owl dragged out of its hole into the sunshine — it struts about first on one foot and then on the other, rolling great eyes around.

Bernard (laughing).— Such a picture resembles you tremendously!

Michel.— You did not observe owls in the convent.

Hélène.— No, my observation of owls dates from my early childhood. My mother had retired into the country where she was making a tolerably good living — she was the village dressmaker. In the attic of the house in which we boarded were always a number of owls. When I was good, to reward me, I was taken to look at them; when I was naughty, to punish me, I was locked in with them.

Bernard.— In point of ingenuity it almost equalled the invention of heaven or hell. But excuse me! I shock you. A young girl educated by nuns!

Hélène.— Oh! I am not very devout!

Michel (laughing to HÉLÈNE).—Don't climb up your tree! Not having yet had the opportunity to observe you he invents anything to loosen your tongue!

Bernard.— Too much wit, Mr. Rénaud!

Hélène (laughing heartily and ready to clap her hands like a joyful child).
— Monsieur Rénaud! You throw out that name with conviction!

Bernard.— I do not throw it out — I call Rénaud 'Rénaud.' Why are you laughing? (*Looking at MICHEL.*) What does she know?

Hélène.— Everything (*pointing to MICHEL*). He makes no secret of it, and I am exploding!

Michel.— Oh! the little scamp! Not a cent's worth of patience — a type I know!

Bernard (to MICHEL).— You — we are going to settle that business at once!

Hélène.— Shall I go?

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Bernard.— On the contrary, remain, in case you might be needed. (*Motioning to the gallery.*) You will be comfortable over there. What I have to say will not take long. (*HÉLÈNE goes over to the gallery and sits down. Scarcely has she moved away before the conversation begins again between the two men.*) So you let her know who you are?

Michel.— Why, yes! I did.

Bernard.— With the intention of taking charge of her?

Michel.— You are joking! I told her you are my brother, without adding that she is my daughter.

Bernard.— The very thing that could annoy me and not cause you the least inconvenience. Decidedly, you mean war?

Michel.— Oh! Not at all. You will have proof of it when I tell you the motive for my journey.

Bernard.— Why tell her your real name?

Michel.— Why put me in her presence?

Bernard.— I should have driven her from my house, I suppose, to make room for you?

Michel.— It would have been enough not to have removed her from the convent where she was, even yesterday! Who obliged you to bring her suddenly to your house? In other years you did not give her even an hour's vacation, and here you are giving her one before the prizes are distributed. You are in such haste to get her on the train that you don't even take time to buy her a gown.

Bernard.— Give gowns yourself then, to your daughter!

Michel.— You are so remarkably charitable that one remains lost in admiration with one's hands in one's pockets watching you empty yours. Answer my question. What spurred you so? (*A pause.*) Eh! Tell me, you schemer! My return! There is certainly some link between my presence and Hélène's arrival.

Bernard.— And what of that?

Michel.— What of that? I might ask some explanation, but pah! If you thought of fooling me, it is more yourself you have fooled. You are a schemer, you, a man who leaves nothing to chance! I am impulsive, capable of putting my skin at the mercy of a stranger whose face pleases me. If I talked, whose fault is it? The girl seemed rather nice and I enjoyed pumping her! Come now, none of this is very serious; only your manner of throwing my daughter at my head didn't suit me, and when I am attacked I have rather brutal reactions.

Bernard.— There is the real truth out! One might have fancied the charm of that young girl had wrung your secret from you. Sweet illusion.

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

A trifle irritates you and without even verifying whether I have the smallest cause of complaint against you, you immediately give me great cause for worry — It is your way! You treat me as you once treated France!

Michel.— Yes, old man, I do you that honor! You; France, a fly buzzing about my nose — so long as it's outside of me — pooh!

Bernard.— It is monstrous.

Michel.— Exactly, I am a monster! You couldn't pay me a finer compliment! Monsters alone have strength enough to push egotism as far as greatness. They are giants among the idiots and cowards that form the human flock.

Bernard.— For you every good man, or simply an inoffensive one, is then an idiot or a coward?

Michel.— That's exactly it.

Bernard.— What am I, then?

Michel.— Oh! certainly not an idiot! This morning while you were bobbing to the flag, I felt like strangling you, because I have particular ideas about that thing; I send bullets at it, but I don't care to have it fooled with! I remember what a local paper said, which I read yesterday while I was eating my dinner at the inn: 'In Bernard's speech the echo of Michel's guns was heard.' That is truly inspired! We are, you and I, people who draw on the nation. One gingerly, the other ferociously —two monsters!

Bernard.— Only one, if you please. I have, indeed, everything needful to be a monster. The boldness, the intelligence, an all-pervading egotism which precludes all scruples. I cut my way without bothering much about the means and my speeches often flatter the people to the detriment of the public good. Yesterday, at the tribune, I bargained off the defenders of the flag; to-day I salute the flag. It was, it is true, made with the hat of a traitor, and I considered it a delightful irony, up to the time the flag crossed my threshold, for then I blushed at being no more than a clown. You see I am not mincing words. You can then believe me, if I tell you that in spite of my wrongs I remain a useful citizen, applying himself to fruitful reforms, and whose deeds are, on the whole, beneficent. Do you know why? Simply because I never lose sight of those twenty lines that future historians will dedicate to me. I am taking care of my page in the history of France.

Michel.— I see that — you dream of glory!

Bernard.— Yes — the real! — after death! The only one!

Michel.— The only one, you say?

Bernard.— The living get only popularity. You become glorified when you are no longer there to know! Thus I do not believe in the immortality of the soul, and I work for eternity! I despise, as much as you do, the vile

THE BEAT OF THE WING

masses and I allow myself to be governed by public opinion. Odd nature, for a man who prides himself on being positivish!

Michel.— An instinct like that is not to be explained. Glory is beautiful and you want it, that's all!

Bernard.— It is beautiful! Yes, that is enough to explain my absence of logic. Each time nature requires that an individual should sacrifice his wellbeing to the good of the species, she brings forth something beautiful. For instance, the beauty of the human creature, then lovers locked in each other's arms forget paternity, with all its burdens, maternity with all its pains, that a child may be given to the race. Well, glory, too, helps with its beauty to protect the species.

Michel.— Against whom?

Bernard.— Against people like you and me. You made me confess that I would be a monster if the desire of leaving a great memorial had not made me, if not a brave man, at least a useful one. What I say of myself applies to all beings superlatively endowed. They are too well armed not to have the temptation of oppressing the weak. Without the sublime inconsequence which animates them to use their strength and shed their blood for the benefit of society, in the hope that posterity will remember them, instead of great men there would be only executioners.

Michel.— You are right. Before being an executioner, I had bravely served my country, not out of devotion, but for love of glory. Why, never having ceased to love it, did I not maintain myself at the height to which it had carried me?

Bernard.— You are one of the scamps, fortunately rare, whose egotism is indomitable. As long as yours was young you let yourself be dominated by the intoxication of being acclaimed a hero. But very shortly, egotism took the upper hand. You became a looter, an assassin, a murderer of your parents, a cowardly seducer, a father without feeling. You have broken all barriers, including the only one capable of intimidating a demon like you— Yes, you knocked over even glory!

Michel.— You waste your time reviewing my crimes. (*Pointing to HÉLÈNE.*) That child weeping over me has just placed them before me in so poignant a way that I would give everything in the world for her not to be my child. As for you, you have won my respect. I do not mention it in order to flatter you. My respect does not flatter,— but to give myself confidence. You do not belong to the illustrious ones who are bloated with a stupid self-satisfaction. I felt, through what you said, a great sadness. You perceive your renown floating off in a majestic flight toward a distant future and you are the prisoner of a short life. Bernard, we were made to understand each other. You shall have glory! I have not renounced it —

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Bernard (sarcastically).— Repeat that!

Michel.— I wish to conquer glory!

Bernard.— If a black sheep of your species dreams of it, then that is just the time when he must fall into the trap laid by nature for the rebel.

Michel.— Why 'trap?' Ah, yes. To be good, serviceable, useful for love of some beautiful dream which you never grasp since it stretches out its arms to you for the other side of the grave. Never mind! Some of the living come so near to it that their faces are glorified with the reflection of its radiance. Can I not be one of those living ones?

Bernard.— Alive or dead you will never enter within the circle of eternal light. You are without a country and it is love of country that makes a man great!

Michel.— What if I tried to be a great man by making a country for myself?

Bernard.— How?

Michel (turning toward HÉLÈNE, raising his voice).— Eh! little one. You have heard half of my dream, listen to the rest! (*HÉLÈNE enters the room and listens attentively to the conversation continued between the two men.*) Be assured that I took this journey on purpose to tell you what you are going to hear. If I speak to a deaf man, existence is ended for me, I have nothing more to do but kill myself! What will you decide?

Bernard (coldly).— First let us see.

Michel.— I returned to Africa. The country I traversed adjoins the French possessions of Chari.

Bernard.— Where did you get money for such a journey?

Michel.— I never touched, for my personal needs, the fortune you gave back to me. Small services modestly repaid allowed me to subsist well enough. All this time my capital was increasing and grew into a considerable amount. This amount I divided into two unequal parts; the smaller covered the trip I described; with the other I make myself strong enough in a few months to become the master of a vast empire, adjoining French territory. My intention is then to take back my own name and offer my conquest to France.

Bernard (sarcastically).— You had not accustomed us to so much abnegation.

Michel.— It isn't abnegation — if I give I expect something in return.

Bernard.— What, for heaven's sake?

Michel.— A triumph without precedent. Fancy the entry into Paris of him who will put into the hands of France, like a diamond upon his mistress's finger, a country so rich and well populated. Remember the ovation

THE BEAT OF THE WING

I received of yore, and yet then I brought only the hope of conquest. Where-as this time I shall be offering it!

Bernard.—Tush, my man, you're not going to make a fool of yourself! And I, what part am I to play in all this?

Michel.—My expedition is only possible if I can have brought across the Congo enormous armaments and munitions. I don't ask for money, but it is of the utmost necessity that I should obtain, upon your credit, the good will of France for the deeds of Mr. Rénaud.

Bernard.—In short, it simply means to begin anew in the name of Rénaud the adventure of Michel Prinson. Well no! I'll have nothing to do with it.

Michel.—You can't be compromised. An individual without any mission. A schemer you deny in case of disaster. Only see that I am let alone. No risk! Everything is prepared. Over twenty negro kings, whose friendship I have made await only my arrival to —

Bernard.—You are losing your time. I to send you over there! Then would I be drawing the trigger on my country!

Michel.—Do you prefer to kill me?

Bernard.—Oh! No sentiment! Leave it at that!

Michel.—At least know where you will send me then. I have decided to offer myself to the first Buffalo Bill that comes along who will engage me for his circus. In this I but imitate Cronje, the Boer general whom some Barnum exhibited at the St. Louis Exposition. You can count on a nice scandal! Your brother will be seen in the midst of a crowd of negroes seated in the brush, spying on a French convoy passing through the wilds. I shall see everything!

Bernard.—Fake! Fake! Fake! of blood and mud!

Michel (*passing his hand over his face at the spot indented by the scars*). —Look! Actors' make-up is washed off more easily than these.

Bernard.—There are fakes even in the shadow of the guillotine, and it too can make deep gashes. What reason have you to commit such an outrage? Cronje had a good one; starvation. But you?

Michel.—You must understand that life devoid of violent sensations is impossible for me! What I want out of the circus are the cat calls of the populace maddened by my presence, the insults and curses, the blows, and peril of death — I would face them! It would be my last battle!

Bernard.—Never, in France, will the government allow you to appear in public — it would be the shame of the nation.

Michel.—In Belgium, in Switzerland, in Italy, never mind where! I should certainly find some country to show me a little mercy. Yes, even

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

abroad, I hope there will be among the audience a French officer who will take out his pistol and brain me.

Bernard.— I hope so too! (*He leaves brusquely.*)

SCENE III

HÉLÈNE, MICHEL

Michel.— You hear him! And he is my brother!

Hélène.— The horrible man! Try to forget him! Listen to me! I don't want you to join a circus. I know how to prevent you.

Michel.— You, my poor child!

Hélène.— Let me see! If you were not alone, would that make you feel like living?

Michel.— To be not alone any more. But — who would keep me company?

Hélène.— I! You tell me phantoms come to visit you and help you to bear your life. Well, it is no phantom now, but a creature of flesh and blood who knocks at your door. Give me hospitality. I will console you better than your marionettes.

Michel.— By what pretext could I take you to live with me, what will you be?

Hélène.— Your daughter! I am what is known as a natural child. The first passerby who so wills it has a right to declare that he is my father. Declare it! I will have the same attachment for you as if I were your real daughter.

Michel.— Such an idea! Who whispered it to you?

Hélène.— No one, I swear —

Michel.— In the convent I suppose they informed you carefully of the fate of natural children?

Hélène.— Alas! Yes, in the convent! Not the sisters. A pupil who came from the country where I had lived with my mother and knew she was not married. To insult me the wretched girl used to enlighten me — heavens! How she made me suffer! At least I learned that if it suits me to choose a father and he accepts, we don't need anybody's consent.

Michel.— But in the end, what is it that makes you so kind to me?

Hélène.— That which makes you kind to me. Never has any one spoken so nicely to me. You, the great ogre. Let me show you a little gratitude.

Michel (with a bitter laugh).— Oh! What a discovery! You, obliged to me! Tell me you pity me! That is the word! Pity — no, little one, I don't eat that bread.

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Hélène.— Do you take me for a saint who devotes herself out of charity? I admire you and I am proud of saving you. As soon as you entered this house I was struck by the mystery that surrounded you and I did not cease to observe you. All I saw imposed respect. When the officer who carried the flag asked you the way you replied, 'I don't belong to the house!' in a tone signifying — 'I no longer belong to this world.' Then you knocked against me as you ran away. Your eyes were full of tears. I knew nothing about you; yet I guessed at that very instant they were not tears of sorrow.

Michel.— They in no way resemble them! I had vowed to myself that that flag should float some day over my future conquests. When it appeared I felt like a conqueror — I could see myself already returning from Africa and carried in triumph by the Parisians! I wept with pride!

Hélène.— That is a fine thing! To weep with pride when in your place the average man would but complain and groan. Your perseverance in your quest for glory makes you greater than if you possessed glory, and since you must definitely renounce it, I wish to give you enough affection to take its place.

Michel.— Oh! To take its place!

Hélène.— I am explaining to the best of my ability the thought that occurred to me while you were describing that pale man that a great beat of the wing carried upward. Listening to you I seemed to be among the crowd that applauded you! 'T was by the breath of their love that you were carried heavenward. When you go in the conquest of glory into the depths of the desert, you seek, without knowing it, the tenderness of humanity. Don't you see that my tenderness is, in a very small way, that which you are pursuing to the furthestmost parts of the earth!

Michel.— Yes, I have a desperate passion for glory! The passion that people have who destroy themselves in order to get rid of themselves, who fall in love with a woman because her smile promises forgetfulness. I, from whose face women turn with horror, I adore glory as a smile upon the lips of humanity!

Hélène.— You see indeed how glory and love are but one, and that my affection comes at a critical time, when your hopes of greatness are destroyed!

Michel.— I cannot accept. You do not know what you offer. It is too much.

Hélène.— Is that a reason not to want it?

Michel.— Yes, it is a reason. My brutish heart is still capable of fondness. This is but the second time we meet, and yet it will be hard for me to part from you. Think what it would be after a long intimacy!

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Hélène.— Why should we separate ?

Michel.— Because some day you may learn who I am.

Hélène.— What more can I learn about you ? I know all your crimes.

Michel.— All, except the one that would most revolt you. Ah! All the worse! I am going to tell you. You will turn your back on me, if you can't forgive me.

Hélène.— How queer you are to imagine that one more crime could frighten me. You take me for a little white angel who faints at a lively word. Ah, well, no! I will wager that there is many a bandit with a less resolute heart than I. You know how I detest society which has shown me only misery and shame, a society in league with the man who was my father. ✓

Michel.— That very man, eh ? You would see him die like a dog at your feet, and not move a finger to help him ?

Hélène.— My mother almost cursed him on her death bed. I hate him with all my strength! Let us speak of you.

Michel.— On the contrary, let us not do so. My opinion is fixed. I shall say nothing.

Hélène.— As you like, so long as you accept! May I call you father ?

Michel.— No, indeed no! I resign all hope.

Hélène.— My offer gives you a sight of salvation, I feel it. Why repulse it ? Does my character frighten you ?

Michel.— Yes, my child. I cannot keep from smiling to hear you declare yourself the enemy of society, because of a few bitter feelings you cherish against it. To let you attach yourself to me in the heyday of your youth, at an age to assure yourself of a splendid future, would be a dastardly action. To walk hand in hand with me one must be a reprobate! Had you fallen in the depths of the whirlpool in which I am struggling, I should say: 'Very well! Let us both try to get out!' But into such a whirlpool one does not fall consciously!

Hélène.— What! You accept as friends only those who fire on the flag! How discouraging! After all, I do keep a ray of hope! When do you leave ?

Michel.— This very day.

Hélène.— No, I should like to talk to you once more. One more day, What difference can it make to you ? Come to-morrow morning.

Michel.— Could we not meet somewhere else ? I prefer not to see my brother again.

Hélène.— Bear this slight annoyance for my sake. I should especially like to have our interview here. May I count on you ?

Michel.— Yes, I will come. It will be to say good by to you.

Hélène.— I shall expect you before nine.

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Michel.— That will suit admirably. I can then take a train towards noon.

Hélène (starting to leave).— Au revoir! Until to-morrow, I shall be very busy.

Michel.— What doing?

Hélène.— Rolling in the whirlpool! (*They separate.*)

ACT III

SCENE I

BERNARD, CLOTILDE

BERNARD *is busy reading the newspapers.* Enter CLOTILDE.

Clotilde.— No news as yet?

Bernard.— No, nothing — I am waiting! Over a half hour since I sent Charles; he can't be long now getting back.

Clotilde.— And we shall learn that Michel has gone.

Bernard.— I hope so, but I fear not.

Clotilde.— All the worse! If he did not take a train last night, we shall see him to-day. Do you know where he is stopping?

Bernard.— No. I told Charles to go first to the White Horse. It is the only inn around here where they receive newspapers hostile to me, and Michel quoted a passage from *La Vigie* that he had read at dinner. (*The SERVANT enters.*) Ah! Here is Charles.

SCENE II

BERNARD, CLOTILDE, CHARLES

Bernard (to the SERVANT).— You carried out my orders?

Charles.— I have just come from Jossigny. Mr. Rénaud passed the night at the White Horse.

Bernard.— They did not guess you were sent by me?

Charles.— I was careful to follow monsieur's instructions. It was easy! The innkeeper had more to do than interest himself in me: half the regiment is encamped there. I made a porter talk. He carries the guests' valises. He was ordered to take Mr. Rénaud's to the eleven o'clock train.

Barnard.— All right, thank you. Find out if Miss Froment is up yet. As soon as she is ready, ask her to come here to us.

Charles.— Yes, sir. (*He leaves.*)

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

SCENE III

BERNARD, CLOTILDE

Clotilde.— What do you wish to say to Hélène ?

Bernard.— I am curious to know what happened yesterday when I left her alone with Michel. Their interview lasted fully twenty minutes. After my brother's departure I did not have time to look after her. I was obliged to receive the electors till dinner time, and after dinner be interested in the colonel's campaigns. While I was listening to this good man I kept my eye on Hélène. It seemed to me she was very gay.

Clotilde.— Yes, in a delightful humor.

Bernard.— You cannot get it out of my head that my brother is prolonging his stay on her account. I shall make sure of it by getting her to talk. In case of Michel's having swallowed the bait, I might, by good advice, hasten events.

Clotilde.— If I were you I should tell Hélène squarely that Michel is her father.

Bernard.— What a mistake! She told you she hated her unknown father.

Clotilde.— Yes, but she is impressed with Michel. I shall never believe that physical attraction can be annihilated by a mere mental aversion.

Bernard.— If she forgave Michel without being taken away by him, we would be left with a relative on our hands. Relations of such a stamp. No! (*HÉLÈNE enters; she shakes hands with CLOTILDE and BERNARD.*)

SCENE IV

BERNARD, CLOTILDE, HÉLÈNE

Bernard (gaily to HÉLÈNE).— Up already ?

Hélène.— For a long time. Not according to my usual habit, I slept badly.

Bernard.— You had been present during the day at a rather painful scene; it made you nervous.

Hélène.— Probably. Why are you so cruel to that unfortunate man ?

Bernard.— One is cruel with tigers.

Hélène.— I, a child, I tamed him at a moment's notice.

Bernard.— It is true! When I joined you, you both appeared to be the best of friends. You should be proud to possess so great a power to tame monsters. I haven't such good luck. Was he not too odious with his

THE BEAT OF THE WING

threat to get himself cut to pieces in a circus so as to revenge himself on me for my refusal!

Hélène.— He had no idea of revenge. He would go to the circus to see thousands of men, wild with rage, fall upon him. Alone, against them all, calm and disdainful in the face of the howling mob, he would be superb! Cries of enthusiasm would burst out from among his assassins. While he was dying he would have the sensation of being a hero!

Bernard.— Why does he need to end a peculiarly ugly life with beauty?

Hélène.— His life is not ugly. He deserves the wrath that has overwhelmed him, but under the weight of all that wrath he uplifts himself with splendid energy. I am going to say something which he would be capable of thrashing me for, if he heard it; don't you think that with all his air of wishing to dominate a nation, he is really at that nation's feet? While he was promising to conquer a kingdom for France I got the impression that he was begging his country's forgiveness.

Bernard.— Without humbling himself!

Hélène.— If he humbled himself it would be less touching. To express so ardent a desire to hear his name glorified, is it not confessing how much it hurts him to be detested?

Bernard.— Evidently, his desperate ambition is pathetically beautiful. Unfortunately we can do nothing.

Hélène.— Perhaps not you, but I —

Bernard.— You see some way to help him?

Hélène.— Yes, a very simple way.

Bernard.— What?

Hélène.— You heard how once I wanted to join the order of the Little Sisters of the Poor, which means being a servant to the infirm. I gave it up because I did not possess enough Christian charity to love beings more or less repulsive. But your brother — I would not deserve much credit if I attached myself to him — I would make his life so easy that he would forget his dreams. My idea may be crazy. What do you think?

Bernard.— Miss Hélène, a romantic idea is not always a crazy one. Yours is excellent; I approve of it immensely. To create duties for oneself is the secret of embellishing life! I see but one objection; under what pretext will you go to Michel, who is not an infirm old man?

Hélène.— Wounds of the heart bleed as much as the other kind.

Bernard.— Yes, but from within.

Hélène.— He showed me his, the most difficult part is done.

Bernard (remonstrating).— Still — what would you be to this man, who is neither old nor ill — a nurse? A sister of charity? Nothing fits!

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Hélène.— One thing fits — his daughter!

Bernard.— Bravo! That is well thought of!

Clotilde (throwing her arms about HÉLÈNE).— Let me embrace you! How charming of you!

Bernard.— The next step is to pave the way prudently with Michel.

Hélène.— Must one be so particular with a man who has nothing left but to kill himself? I offered to be his daughter.

Bernard.— How, offered?

Hélène.— Yes, — scarcely had you left us. Did I not tell you the most difficult part had been done?

Bernard.— What did he answer.

Hélène.— That he would not accept.

Bernard.— So all is over?

Hélène (embarrassed).— No indeed! I still have hope.

Bernard.— He asked for time to think it over?

Hélène (grasping at the idea).— That's it — to think it over. This morning I am to have my answer.

Bernard.— Ah! You expect a visit?

Hélène.— Yes, it is almost time now.

Bernard.— Well, you will see him. I am told he is still in the neighborhood.

Hélène.— I know it; this morning I saw him from my window. He walked around the garden several times.

Bernard.— What was he looking for?

Hélène.— Me, no doubt.

Bernard.— Why did you not join him? It was a chance to settle it.

Hélène.— I had not finished dressing.

Bernard.— Nonsense! Under such circumstances one is not so careful. (*Interrupting himself.*) Eh? Some one walking in the garden. (*Running to the window.*) It is Michel. He seems undecided — now he's stopping. There! He has seated himself on a bench. (*To HÉLÈNE.*) We will run away discreetly. Call him.

Hélène.— No, no: I don't want to see him now.

Bernard.— Why?

Hélène.— They are coming after the flag. We would not be left alone. I would rather not speak to him until after the ceremony. Keep him here, I will fly. (*She leaves.*)

SCENE V

BERNARD, CLOTILDE

Clotilde.— What a strange girl!

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Bernard.— She would have a thousand opportunities to learn Michel's decision before the flag is carried away. There! Do you wish my opinion? She is not telling the truth, or at least she is concealing some important detail. (*Looking outside.*) Ah! Michel is rising. He is slowly approaching. (*Clotilde leans close to the window pane.*) Take care! Don't show yourself. He is looking at all the windows.

Clotilde.— He seems tired — how broken he is since yesterday!

Bernard.— If he should enter, receive him.

Clotilde.— How good you are!

Bernard.— After what has occurred I can no longer speak to him. Even for his own sake any discussion must be prevented, so that all his hopes may be concentrated in his daughter's direction.

Clotilde.— If I am to remain with him, send me re-enforcements; Jeanne, the colonel, whoever you can —

Bernard.— I am going to see the colonel now and I will return with him. As long as any stranger is here there is nothing to be afraid of.

Clotilde.— He is making up his mind; here he is! (*She steps back into the room, seats herself near a table, takes a paper and composes herself.*)

Bernard (as he reaches the door).— Do your best. (*He goes out.*)

SCENE VI

CLOTILDE, MICHEL

(*MICHEL enters. He takes several steps in CLOTILDE's direction, and speaks only after he is sure she is alone.*)

Michel.— Good morning, Clotilde — do you recognize me? I am your brother-in-law. In the old days you always treated me in a friendly way. Help me — entreat your husband in my behalf — what I ask is not dangerous. I go in quest of a name. Save your old Michel!

Clotilde (at first moved, regains her composure and answers in icy tones). — Monsieur Rénaud, my brother-in-law has been dead a long time — do not let us mention him.

Michel (bursting forth with a laugh that is almost a sob).— Ha! ha! ha! Very pretty! A really amusing joke. Worth the journey! Adieu, madame. (*He turns about on his heel, dizzy, endeavoring to go out, then straightens himself with a violent effort and returns to CLOTILDE.*) Am I not absent-minded! I was forgetting the most important thing — I would like to have a word with that child, the orphan. Ha! ha! ha! Orphaned of father and mother!

Clotilde.— You shall see her, Monsieur Rénaud.

(*HÉROUARD, BERNARD, JEANNE, enter.*)

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

SCENE VII

CLOTILDE, MICHEL, HÉROUARD, BERNARD, JEANNE

*Clotilde (to the COLONEL, who advances to shake hands with her, already belted, booted, and buckled).—*Colonel!

*Hérouard.—*Indeed, yes! Madame, soon they will require me.

*Clotilde.—*You were not too uncomfortable I trust in your small quarters? I reproach myself for having put you there. Not a very large room, and this morning, when I awakened, I remembered your explanations about the flag. A comrade taking up much space, you said —

*Hérouard.—*You are too kind to bother about so little. I occupied the room all to myself. The flag bearer, learning the adjoining chamber was empty deposited the flag in there.

*Clotilde.—*To be sure — the blue room, between Miss Froment's and yours. Why did I not think of it?

*Bernard (to CLOTILDE).—*I say, wife of mine, time flies; we ought to give the colonel his breakfast.

*Clotilde (shrugging her shoulders).—*Be sure, my friend, I thought about that long ago.

*Hérouard.—*Dear deputy, I've been spoiled. I breakfasted at my bedside. I am ready now to receive my men.

*Michel.—*I am surprised to find you going to the manoeuvres so late.

*Hérouard.—*Excuse me, Monsieur Rénaud, I did not see you. There are no manoeuvres to-day. We are moving camp. As the heat is quite bearable, I decided to make a late morning of it — so my boys are taking it easy. (*Drawing out his watch.*) They should be here in two minutes, and nothing as yet announces the fact. That is what is called military promptness. You who come fresh from Jossigny, give me the news. Is the regiment starting?

*Michel.—*I am not fresh from the village. Since dawn I've been walking.

*Hérouard.—*Was it not you I saw from my window, strolling along the cliffs on the other side of the garden?

*Michel.—*Perhaps. I was ahead of time and for quite a while I've been strolling around the neighborhood.

*Hérouard (approaching MICHEL).—*I must let you know that your trousers are torn — there, at the knee —

*Michel (after examining the place).—*It happened as I climbed over the garden rail. They caught.

*Hérouard.—*You did not come through the gate?

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Bernard.— Were doors made for him? Yesterday, too, he entered the garden like a robber.

Michel (waving toward HÉLÈNE as she enters).— And here is a young girl to whom my unexplained presence caused a terrible fright. She was quietly reading and suddenly she beheld me standing before her.

SCENE VIII

CLOTILDE, MICHEL, HÉROUARD, BERNARD, JEANNE, HÉLÈNE

Hélène (interrupting MICHEL).— No, sir, I was not terribly frightened. A nervous start is not fear. (*Laughing rather forcedly.*) If you take me for a wet hen, you make a mistake! I am very resolute and I shall prove it sooner or later.

Hérouard (laughing).— You are proving it now.

Jeanne (to HÉLÈNE).— Monsieur Rénaud is very proud whenever he puts a young girl to flight. I am not sorry that he has at last met his match.

Michel (with feverish gaiety, beneath which despair is noticeable to HÉLÈNE).— You, too, against me! (*To JEANNE.*) And then, you. (*Looking toward CLOTILDE.*) Whom else? Whose turn next?

Hérouard (to HÉLÈNE).— Mademoiselle, you have no right to attack any one. Yesterday your behavior was shocking; to prefer to twirl your thumbs instead of dance with my officers! It's enough to disgust any one with being a soldier!

Jeanne (to HÉROUARD).— And I, who waltzed all day, I suppose I didn't count! Your lieutenants, though, did not seem disgusted!

Hérouard (laughing).— Ah! permit me, mademoiselle, you are begging the question. (*While HÉROUARD endeavors to atone for his mistake, BERNARD approaches his wife and talks to her in an undertone.*)

Bernard.— Well?

Clotilde.— What a state of affairs! He nearly threw himself at my feet.

Bernard.— The grand play, then?

Clotilde.— Yes — 'Clotilde! My sister-in-law! Your old Michel!' The whole scale!

Bernard.— You did not weaken?

Clotilde.— Michel dead — I held to that, not without trouble, because he was pitiful. (*Showing the little gathering that is gaily conversing.*) Now again I see in his eyes a real anguish. Go over to them and get the colonel off as soon as you can. For Michel's sake, I want to get it over.

Bernard.— If you were to go away, he would feel more at his ease.

Clotilde.— And what of me! (*Aloud.*) Jeanne, will you go as far as the road with me? We will see if the soldiers are climbing the hill.

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Jeanne.— Yes, and I'll rush back and tell the colonel. (*She moves away.*)

Hérouard (following her with his eyes).— In her I have a charming little aid-de-camp. (*CLOTILDE and JEANNE go into the garden.*)

SCENE IX

MICHEL, HEROUARD, BERNARD, HÉLÈNE

Bernard.— Charming? No. I shall regard her as a bird of ill augur since she will bring you the signal to depart.

Hérouard.— Really? I can trust that my presence has not been too inopportune?

Bernard (protesting).— O colonel!

Hérouard.— But! The unexpected guest that one takes in out of a sense of duty —

Bernard (interrupting).— It is mean of you to accuse us of such sentiments. We shall miss you very much. Believe me, colonel, your stay in this house will mark a date in my life. Until to-day I fancied the old formulas of patriotism held good only in uncultivated minds. That morning, when I went out to salute the flag, I was conceding something to the prejudices of those who elected me, and I was not as imbued with respect as my attitude made me appear. Well! From the moment that the flag was brought forward, I received the impression that the officer, in saluting with his sword, was offering his life and that of his soldiers, and that the flag accepted! Better than that! When the flag passed by me to cross this threshold, I bowed my head, oh! this time, sincerely moved. 'T was a prince coming beneath my roof. Never vassal received with greater submission the visit of his lord. I speak to you as to a friend, to whom one is not afraid of unveiling one's failings.

Hérouard.— Ah! Monsieur Prinson, I envy your eloquence; it would help me to thank you. Our calling is not in great favor these days. It seems quite simple that we should go to Madagascar and have our bones broken, to Tonquin or the Soudan, so long as we allow ourselves to be treated like fools and good for nothings. 'Tis expected! But, pah! idiots like us are needed! Just the same I find it a relief to meet some one before whom one need not blush for being one of those idiots! There is one man of sense alive who admits that a nation has gone to the devil when it ceases to honor military courage! When I was told I would be put up at Deputy Prinson's, by Jove, I must admit, I wasn't particularly tickled. Your speeches, as they are given in the newspapers have so little resemblance to what I am now hearing! When reading the reports from the Chamber of Deputies one often has to ask 'How can France still exist?' And then one sees that in

THE BEAT OF THE WING

spite of everything France is still standing; and then, too, one realizes that there must be some restrictive. Well, now! I know there is a man there. You're a better fellow than you appear. You love France! You love her flag! You don't separate one from the other! The flag! To understand all that means you must hear balls whistling past. A priest has his God living, incarnate in the host,—and the flag to us means a real presence. When it flies in battle 'tis our country herself stretching out her arms to her stricken soldier. When you began to speak of the flag as if it were a human being, I thrilled from head to foot; *It is!*

Michel.—I am an old soldier, and I've done more than hear balls whistle past. Look! (*He raises his hand to his face.*) Yes, you are right! The flag is a human being! But that being is not country! I have noticed beneath the enemy's fire, soldiers of a foreign legion, or people who sell their blood; negroes, plunderers. Around that being who is in question their courage increased wildly. They would let themselves be hacked for her. Yet it was not their country!

Hérouard.—Then what was it?

Michel.—Glory!

Hérouard.—How can that touch negroes who have not even a word to express it, or those desperadoes who have lost even their name?

Michel.—You too, colonel, have led those two types of people into battle. Yes or no, is it a fact that the flag exalts their courage?

Hérouard.—Yes, it is true!

Michel.—How do you explain it?

Hérouard.—For them the flag incarnates the regiment. That esprit de corps, which is a small form of patriotism, enflames them. They protect, against the enemy, the emblem of the regiment, with a passion analogous to that which certain games develop. When children fight over a ball there are often broken arms and legs.

Michel.—I have known rebels who had a terrible hatred for the regiment, yet who could not see the flag without turning pale. One therefore did not represent the other. Do you know what makes the flag sacred to negroes and outcasts? It is because they have learned that a whole nation attaches extreme importance to the preservation of that bit of cloth. That rage and scorn await those who allow it to be taken—respect and praise to those who save it—Ah! They have no illusions, those wretches. They hope for neither honor nor triumph—but they feel in a confused way that the exaltation of a whole nation for one object, a man or a thing, constitutes the most thrilling vision possible to contemplate. The object becomes impregnated finally with the sentiment it inspires. I have seen, in the depths

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

of sanctuaries where thousands of pilgrims crowded, wooden virgins, grown really divine from having heard the ardent prayers and supplications of those throngs. They cured the incurable and converted sinners. The flag itself is woven out of heroism, enthusiasm, and exaltation. It flies aloft swelling out with human emotions. The most humiliated brows are radiant before it. *It is beauty! It is glory!*

Hérouard.—Beauty, that's certain. One fights for it as you would fight on the high road for a beautiful woman.

Michel.—And if a rebel should come to the point of firing on it — well! You kill the woman you find in the other man's arms. You kill and you adore!

Hérouard.—Monsieur Rénaud. You can't make it filter through my old noddle that a soldier can love his flag and fire on it. Moreover, that same noddle will ever confuse patriotism and glory. In spite of which you have said things just now that pleased me. Where did you serve?

Michel (fiercely).—It is of no consequence — I am one of those who have lost even their name.

Hérouard.—I do not insist. (*He stretches out his hand.*) A handshake, anyway.

Michel.—Not even that.

Hérouard (in a resigned tone).—Ah! Ah! I am sorry. (*JEANNE enters first, followed shortly by CLOTILDE.*)

SCENE X

MICHEL, HÉROUARD, BERNARD, HÉLÈNE, JEANNE, CLOTILDE

Jeanne.—Here they are.

Hérouard.—Still very far away?

Clotilde (entering).—Very near, unfortunately.

Hérouard.—Permit me to see if my orderly is saddling my horse.

Clotilde (who has remained by the door).—The horse is there. Already the loafers are circling around him. (*Excepting HÉLÈNE and MICHEL, all the characters stand near JEANNE and CLOTILDE, and grouped about them watch events. Outside are numerous voices, interspersed with calls, with unfinished verses of the Marseillaise hymn, and almost immediately, above all other sounds, the even tread of the company and the click of their arms are heard. A command: the company halts and faces front. Other commands. The sounds of conversation are resumed. The musicians test their instruments. A clarinet rolls out several notes. Meanwhile HÉLÈNE and MICHEL remain alone on the front of the stage. As soon as the others have left them HÉLÈNE turns toward MICHEL and speaks to him in a joyful tone.*)

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Hélène.— Good morning! Are you still annoyed with me? What an evil look!

Michel.— The look of a beast at bay.

Hélène.— If you knew, you would look differently. Have faith. Don't you see I am pleased?

Michel.— You are right, little young creature; for you life can be lovely!

Hélène.— For both of us, I hope! (*The flag bearer enters, followed by two SUBALTERNS.*)

SCENE XI

MICHEL, HÉROUARD, BERNARD, HÉLÈNE, JEANNE, CLOTILDE, THE FLAG BEARER

Hérouard (*making a sign to the flag bearer, who places himself, heels together, military fashion, before him*).— Can you find your way to the room in which the flag is?

The Flag Bearer.— Yes, certainly, colonel.

Hérouard (*with a sign for him to move on*).—Go! (*The FLAG BEARER disappears in the adjoining room. HÉROUARD turning to CLOTILDE and BERNARD prepares to take leave.*) Madame, there is nothing left but for me to thank you for your hospitality, of which I shall always keep a delightful memory.

Bernard.— And don't forget, colonel, that you owe me reparation for suggesting you were here only as a guest to a certain extent forced upon me. You will come soon as a friend. Will you promise?

Clotilde.— Yes, colonel, you must decide upon a date. Come, do so! (*The FLAG BEARER returns in great haste.*)

The Flag Bearer (*much troubled*).— Colonel, the flag has been stolen!

Hérouard.— What! You are crazy!

The Flag Bearer.— Well! It is gone!

Bernard.— How could they get in? Was the window broken open?

The Flag Bearer.— The window is in perfect condition, the shutters tightly fastened. They must have come by the door.

Bernard.— Was it broken down?

The Flag Bearer.— They had only to open it; it was not locked.

Bernard.— This is unpardonable — unheard of!

Hérouard (*intervening to disculpate his man*).— He is not to blame. No ruling compels one to take the same precautions for the flag as for a purse full of banknotes. The only instructions we have are for its preservation.

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Bernard.— Yes — to prevent it being spoiled. No one ever dreamed of its being stolen!

Hérouard.— But who under heaven would have conceived it? What could one do with a stolen flag? It is extraordinary!

Clotilde (going to the doorstep).— There are at least two hundred loungers out there, what will they think!

Bernard (wild).— Yes, colonel, how can we explain it?

Hérouard.— Do I have to report to a lot of loafers?

Bernard.— I, the deputy, in whose house the accident occurred, I have to!

Michel (to BERNARD, in a way that he alone can hear).— Ah! What joy it would be for me to leave you with a dirty story on your hands. But I can't help it — I will speak. (*Advancing to HÉLÈNE and stopping two feet away from her he says to the COLONEL, motioning toward her:*) Here is the thief! (*To HÉLÈNE.*) It is in your room, is it not?

Hélène.— Yes.

Michel (to HÉLÈNE).— You have the key? (*HÉLÈNE nods.*) Give it to me! (*She draws the key out of her pocket and gives it to MICHEL who hands it to the LIEUTENANT.*)

Clotilde (to the FLAG BEARER).— Lieutenant, come, I beg of you. (*She goes out with him.*)

SCENE XII

MICHEL, HÉROUARD, BERNARD, JEANNE, HÉLÈNE

Bernard (to HÉLÈNE).— Why this insane act?

Hélène.— I was found out too soon. I meant to go to my room and throw the flag out of the window at the feet of the soldiers.

Bernard.— I am overwhelmed. What did you expect? What did you hope for?

Hélène.— I wished to be arrested, condemned, put in prison. (*Looking at MICHEL.*) Those that have fallen lowest must feel at home with me!

Hérouard.— Well. Mademoiselle, your strange wish shall not be granted. You shall not be arrested, nor even annoyed. (*Turning to BERNARD.*) It would be cruel to take seriously the mad freak of a girl.

Bernard (to the COLONEL).— Be sure I shall make her pay dearly for her joke.

SCENE XIII

MICHEL, HÉROUARD, BERNARD, JEANNE, HÉLÈNE, CLOTILDE, the FLAG BEARER

(*The FLAG BEARER returns holding the flag and followed by CLOTILDE. He goes straight to HÉROUARD.*)

THE BEAT OF THE WING

Hérouard (to the FLAG BEARER).— All is well?

The Flag Bearer.—Yes, in perfect condition, Colonel. (He moves toward the front door.)

Hérouard (to BERNARD).— Then, good by, dear deputy.

Bernard.— We will all assist at your departure.

Hérouard.— Onward! (All leave except HÉLÈNE and MICHEL. As he goes past the latter, the COLONEL stops and says one word.) Thanks. (Then he joins the others gathered on the doorstep to assist at the ceremony of the flag. The first orders are given.—HÉLÈNE rushes outside like a mad woman. With one stride MICHEL throws himself in her path and bars her way.)

Michel.— Halt! Where are you going? (Showing the flag.) 'Tis a thing one dies for! One does not insult it. (At the same moment, at the command: To the flag! The proper salute bursts forth.) HÉLÈNE falls into an armchair and remains overcome, while MICHEL gazes at the people gathered on the doorstep around the flag. As soon as honors have been paid, commands are given and the company departs. During the following scene the music is heard farther and farther away, playing martial airs. CLOTILDE and JEANNE disappear into the house. BERNARD returns and goes straight to HÉLÈNE.)

Bernard.— Mademoiselle, after such behavior I no longer know you! I give you five minutes in which to leave the house. You will find your luggage at the station. Five minutes, do you hear? (He leaves.)

SCENE XIV

MICHEL, HÉLÈNE

Hélène.— Well! In spite of you, I have what I wanted! On the sidewalk, without shelter, without bread! Will you have the courage to leave me in the street?

Michel.— What! You wished to be even more miserable than I, in order to save my life?

Hélène.— I wished to destroy your scruples. Is it done? Do you intend to take me along?

Michel.— Listen first to a terrible secret that I dared not reveal yesterday and that I can no longer conceal from you to-day. (A pause.) Do you not notice, dear Hélène, that our natures are strangely alike? We act from very different motives, you from excess of charity, I from excess of egotism, but once resolved, we have but one way to reach the end. That theft of the flag, it is the kind of trick I would resort to! Through the smallest act of

FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

Hélène Froment pierces the nature of Michel Prinson. You are brave, earnest, and mad, you are what I was at your age, with one thing added, kindness! I who fancied myself dead, I find myself in you thrilling again with youth and hope. Is it I? Is it you? I no longer know: Father and daughter are one!

Hélène (overcome).— I am afraid I understand: The likeness in our natures is not mere chance then?

Michel.— Well, of course not! You are my daughter, my own daughter, my blood!

Hélène.— The one who basely deserted my mother and me is you! Who as a child stood to me for all that is bad is you!

Michel.— I was bad! With you, I am quite a different man. You say things that stir my very soul! So now when I was despairing of ever obtaining glory, you nobly prove to me that it can be replaced by tenderness! You see those words stirred the very ashes of my heart. They brought to life a glowing ember. I have known my child only one day, and already I love her!

Hélène.— You ought to have loved her for twenty years!

Michel.— Be generous! It is really too easy to crush me! I have suffered so much! I can no more! The reasons I gave for my return were only pretexts my pride invented. In reality, I am only an exile hunting for an opening through which to slip back to humanity, like a lost dog who wanders around hamlets at night scratching at barn doors. Open to me! Bring me back among the living!

Hélène.— Not until you have gained the forgiveness of the dead!

Michel.— What dead?

Hélène.— My poor mother! I remember she was dying and I was praying at her bedside. She interrupted me as I was repeating the old formula in which we recommend to God our father and our mother: 'No, not him, not him! Only me.'

Michel.— She was delirious!

Hélène.— Yes! She no longer concealed her real feelings — if I went with you I should offend her memory.

Michel.— You would offend nothing. Does one allow oneself to be concerned by the vagaries of the sick? Your story proves that usually you were made to pray for me! I had been forgiven. Your mother —

Hélène.— Her last wish was that I should never mingle your two names.

Michel.— What! It isn't enough to have every living soul against me; but even the dead must rise from the grave to snatch my daughter from me! Well! I will fight with the dead even for my daughter. To begin with,
